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MIGHTY JOE YOUNG

STAR TREK
INSURRECTION

CARRIE II

I STILL KNOW
WHAT YOU DID
LAST SUMMER

A BUG'S LIFE

GODS AND
MONSTERS

DESECRATING
PSYCHO

THE REMAKE PLUS A RETROSPECT OF THE CLASSIC

Volume 30 Number 11



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VOLUME 30 NUMBER 11

"The Magazine with a Sense of Wonder"

DECEMBER 1998

Whose film is it, anyway?

That's a question that once was of interest mostly to auteurist critics, but with Hollywood's attempt to build recognizable brand names and soothe big-name egos, the topic has become a controversial one, thanks to the so-called "possessory credit" often awarded to directors (e.g., "A Michael Bay Film" or "A Film by Vincent Ward").

The Writers Guild of America is understandably dedicated to not letting directors take all the credit for what is obviously a collaborative medium; however, their argument against the director's possessory credit has thus far carried little weight—because they haven't really made an argument, except to say they don't like it. Even an ally like editor Peter Bart in his *Daily Variety* column, could only vaguely suggest that the subject cuts to "the heart of the writer's craft."

Frankly, I'd be able to take all this more seriously if it weren't coming from a guild whose arbitration process denies credit (often arbitrarily) to its own members, in order to limit the number of writers' names that can appear in the credits. The reason: if there's one writer and one director, then it's easy to imagine that both contributed equally; however, if there's one director and five writers, then no individual writer can possibly have contributed as much as the director.

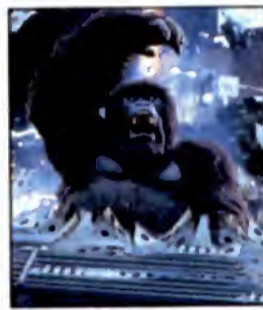
Clearly, many directors do not deserve the possessory, but the WGA is wrong to object to it in all cases; sometimes, it *is* deserved. The tricky part is determining when. The credit should mean something specific: either the director initiated the project, or he had total control or final cut. Even irate writers should be able to agree to some kind of definite guidelines like this.

Meanwhile, I don't hear anyone objecting to possessory credits for producers ("A Jerry Bruckheimer Production") or writers (Stephen King's *SLEEPWALKERS*). Directors deserve to have their contribution equally recognized.

Steve Biodrowski



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DEVIL FAY UNO

By Douglas Eby

Gus Van Sant said it has been an idea of his to return to *PSYCHO* for about ten years: "The studio was interested in re-making films from their library. Originally, the idea just came from my question to them, why wouldn't they make a more high profile film from a period that they were choosing titles from. They tended to be '50s noir films that they liked to remake, and I said, well *PSYCHO* would be great, and it's so well made you wouldn't have to change that much. You could just make it in color, and recast it. It was a low-maintenance idea. Just do this, rather than take an obscure title that no one had ever heard of, and try to fashion a modern story out of it. That seemed harder, and also less successful."

Although Van Sant has followed the original Joseph Stefano script, there have been some changes, in addition to the obvious ones like use of color. "We redesigned the house," Van Sant noted. "It was something we anguished over, because we really liked the original, but there was such a connection with the original film. We thought that even though we were using camera angles and floor plans from the original, we weren't necessarily using art-directed elements, like interior design or exterior design." He noted the famous house on the Universal lot "was almost like a logo" not only for the original, but for the *PSYCHO* sequels two, three and four. "We thought it was time to just get that out of our head," he said.

Van Sant considers the sequels "way more active than the original *PSYCHO*. They were more like *HALLOWEEN* or the splatter genre. We were thinking more along the lines of retaining the original pacing of the story. I was interested in investigating the original storyline and nuances and metaphors, and the original, kind of hidden, meaning in the relationship of the characters. But in discovering those things, you can't help but do it in a different way. You can't do a copy. You have to reinterpret. We were always amazed at the things we would find in the original story or script,

DESECRATING A MASTERPIECE?

*Director Gus Van Sant
on stepping into Alfred
Hitchcock's shadow.*



Anne Heche takes the role of Janet Leigh as Van Sant recreates Hitchcock's famous shower murder in color, a cinematic reinterpretation, or is it sacrilege?

and how you could interpret it in so many different ways. Those are the kinds of things the cast members, and myself, and the cinematographer, would really get into, rather than changing. Because changing, for us, would be adding something that wasn't already there in the story structure."

The film was shot with an aspect ratio 1.85:1, the standard of today, said Van Sant, and cans of the original he has seen are marked 1.75:1. "We assume that was, at the time, a relatively wide-screen ratio, because they were used to shooting in 1.66," Van Sant said. Another significant element of the original is the now-classic music score by Bernard Herrmann, which is to be prepared and rerecorded by Danny Elfman. Van Sant thinks the new track will "have a different feel, but it will definitely be Herrmann's original score." The director brought in writer Joseph Stefano as part of the production: "He was one of our consul-

tants and we worked on some new things in the script." But overall, the script was used in its original form, Van Sant confirmed.

One scene that did have a "makeover, structurally and visually," said Van Sant, was the opening hotel room: "I was under the impression there were some things you really wanted to be saying in the scene, and you set up this relationship, and you showed that the two characters meant something to each other. Anne [Heche] and Viggo [Mortensen], the way they were playing it, was a more informal relationship than the original. It was more of a temporary one. That was something that came about more through the way the actors played it. But the things we did were just to try to make it a little more concise, and less drawn out. That's probably the most restructured area. There's a little piece we put in just before the psychiatrist's wrap-up at the end, where we actually see the psychiatrist sitting in a room with Norman, which was something the original didn't have. It's very short. He walks down a hall and enters an interrogation room. We added it just from a desire to kind of know where the psychiatrist came from when he entered."

The new *PSYCHO* is targeted to a young audience by the studio, said Van Sant. "Mostly because I'm assuming those are the people that haven't seen the original. It's not really aimed that way, but it has them in mind." Of Vince Vaughn, who took over the role of Norman Bates, Van Sant noted, "He's great, he's amazing, fun to work with."

Hitchcock is renowned for his camera moves, noted Van Sant. "Most of his shots are in the film. He definitely was always pushing the envelope as far as the way the camera looked at characters and objects." Hitchcock made a series of TV commercials to promote the original film, but that is not something Van Sant is planning to repeat. "We tried to keep this campaign on a light note because that's what Hitchcock did when he promoted *PSYCHO*, and when he promoted anything, with a glint in his eye." □

FOLLOW THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD

THE WIZARD OF OZ (WB)

As part of their 75th anniversary celebration Warner Bros. dusts off this TV perennial and puts it back on the big screen where it belongs. (Thank God they opted for a re-release rather than a remake—are you listening, Universal?) Once again, you can follow (pictured) Dorothy (Judy Garland), the Tin Man (Jack Haley), and Scarecrow (Ray Bolger) on their trek to the Emerald City. Sure, you've seen it before, but don't let that dissuade you from enjoying the full theatrical experience. Produced by Mervyn Leroy; directed by Victor Fleming; adapted by Noel Langley, from the book by L. Frank Baum.

December 25



MEET JOE BLACK (Universal)

November 13

Brad Pitt stars as Joe in this remake of the Universal DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY. Anthony Hopkins co-stars. Martin Brest (BEVERLY HILLS COP) directed.

MIGHTY JOE YOUNG (BV) December 18

Brad Pitt stars as Joe in this remake—no, wait, that was MEET JOE BLACK, not MIGHTY JOE YOUNG. Actually, Bill Paxton (ALIENS) and Charlize Theron (THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE) star for director Ron Underwood (TREMORS) in this remake of the RKO classic—about a zoologist who discovers an awesome 15-foot gorilla, fearsome and dangerous when provoked, but tame in the hands of the beautiful young woman who raised him. SEE COVER STORY ON PAGE 18

PSYCHO (Universal)

December 4

Gus Van Zant's color-by-the-numbers version of the Alfred Hitchcock classic reaches the screen. Vince Vaughn fills in for the late Anthony Perkins as Norman Bates, and Anne Heche and Julianne Moore fill out the other familiar roles.

THE RUGRATS MOVIE (Paramount)

November 27

"Nap Time is over!" This tag-line is not only a savvy marketing ploy; it also announces to fans that this is indeed a variation on the diminutive, diaper-wearing heroes they've come to know on TV. When it came to bringing these characters to the big screen, co-director Norton Virgien, who won two Emmys for the series, said that the major challenge was to make the film feel like more than just an extended episode. "In television, story telling is a bit cyclical: characters begin and end an episode as more or less the same people. In the feature, we chose to let the characters change and grow," he said. What makes RUGRATS worthy of a feature? "The characters are just so relatable," said Virgien. "Whether we're adults or kids, we know people a lot like these characters. And even though not everyone has little kids in their house, we all were kids at one time." **Mike Lyons**

STAR TREK: INSURRECTION (Paramount)

December 11

The Next Generation climbs aboard the Enterprise for another big-screen adventure. The story pits Picard against the Federation, when it decides to ignore its own Prime Directive in regards to the development of a valuable planet. SEE PAGE 8

BABE: PIG IN THE CITY (Universal)

November 27

The sequel to the sleeper hit of 1995 reaches theatres just in time for Thanksgiving. MAD MAX's George Miller, who produced and co-wrote BABE, takes over the directing reins as well. James Cromwell returns as Farmer Hogg; Mickey Rooney co-stars.

A BUG'S LIFE (Disney) November 20

Director John Lasseter and Pixar Animation follow up TOY STORY with the exciting "ant-ics" of a misfit young ant named Flik as he tries to save his colony from a greedy gang of grasshoppers and their evil leader Hopper. Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Phyllis Diller, Kevin Spacey, Denis Leary, Madeline Kahn, Jonathan Harris, and Roddy McDowall contribute voices. SEE PAGE 16

THE FACULTY (Dimension)

December 25

The teen SCREAM-fest continues with Elija Wood and Laura Harris providing MTV appeal in this Kevin Williamson-penned tale of body-snatching aliens who infiltrate the faculty of the local school. Salma Hayek co-stars. Robert Rodriguez (FROM DUSK TILL DAWN) directed.

FROST (WB)

December 11

Michael Keaton and Kelly Preston star in this tale of a dead father whose soul comes back to his children in the form of a snowman. At one time titled JACK FROST, the film began development as an adaptation of the song "Frosty the Snowman."

GODS AND MONSTERS (Lions Gate) Now Playing (exclusive)

After much debate, Lions Gate finally settled on November 4 for the exclusive debut (in New York and Los Angeles) of this excellent film. Now, the release is widening to other major markets (including Chicago on December 4). If you have any interest in classic Universal horror movies or director James Whale—or just in great filmmaking—keep your eyes open for when it comes to a theatre near you. SEE PAGE 38

IN DREAMS (DreamWorks) 1999

Neil Jordan's psychic thriller, which was supposed to be coming out just about now, has been pushed back until January or February of next year. DreamWorks distribution chief Jim Tharp told *Hollywood Reporter*, "It won't be ready in time. But January is actually a better time for an adult movie." The delay was blamed on underwater filming that took longer than expected. The story follows a woman (Annette Bening) whose dreams are plagued by a psychic link to the mind of a crazed killer, who comes looking for her.

I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER (Columbia) November 20

More slash-and-scars for Jennifer Love Hewitt, who finds that it takes more than a tropical vacation to get away from it all—when what you're trying to get away from is a hook-handed killer. SEE PAGE 10

RELEASE SCHEDULE

Upcoming cinefantastique at a glance, along with a word or two for the discriminating viewer.

compiled by Jay Stevenson
(unless otherwise noted)



THE ZION KING

THE PRINCE OF EGYPT (DreamWorks)

DreamWorks' epic animated drama tells the story of two men: one born a prince, the other born a slave. A lie made them brothers; the truth will send them on separate courses that will eventually collide. Val Kilmer and Ralph Fiennes star, respectively, as Moses and Ramses, brought together by fate and ripped apart by a secret revealed. The vocal cast also includes Sandra Bullock, Danny Glover, Jeff Goldblum, Steve Martin, Helen Mirren, Michelle Pfeiffer, Martin Short, and Patrick Stewart. DreamWorks co-chairman Jeffrey Katzenberg is obviously trying to recapture some of the magic he infused into animated blockbusters while working at Disney. The film features six new songs, written by Oscar-winning lyricist Stephen Schwartz (POCAHONTAS) and a score composed by Oscar-winning composer Hans Zimmer (THE LION KING).

December 18



HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC

BEFORE DUSK TILL DAWN

Robert Rodriguez oversees prequel to his cult flick (oh, there's a sequel, too).

by John Keeyes

With the aid of Robert Rodriguez, the legacy of FROM DUSK TILL DAWN will continue with not only a sequel (TEXAS BLOOD MONEY) but also a prequel (THE HANGMAN'S DAUGHTER). How did the moderately successful 1996 release come to have back-to-back follow-ups?

"Quentin [Tarantino], Lawrence Bender, and Scotty Spiegel had an idea for the second one," said Rodriguez, who directed DUSK TILL DAWN from Tarantino's script. "We were meeting about it, and my cousin and I had come up with an idea for a possible third one. It would be set back in the 1800s, more like a spaghetti-western vampire movie when the pyramid was still there, of course, because the pyramid's been there forever. A lot of the same characters are still in there, and it takes place in the wild west. It's about Johnny Madrid who escapes the noose and runs off with the hangman's daughter to the famed bar. The daughter turns out to be Salma Hayek's character [Satanico Pandemonium], and her destiny is to become the queen of the vampires."

After pitching the prequel idea, Robert and Alvaro Rodriguez were commissioned to script HANGMAN'S DAUGHTER, with Robert overseeing pre-production. "I had to write the script, find a director, be a producer, and I hadn't done this before," he said. "It was bizarre. And it all came out cool. We kind of



Robert Rodriguez (seen filming FROM DUSK TILL DAWN with producer-wife Elizabeth Avellan) conceived & produced the prequel, HANGMAN'S DAUGHTER.

got two movies for the price of one by shooting them back to back down in Africa."

Rodriguez had little involvement on the sequel, TEXAS BLOOD MONEY. "We split-up the duties so we wouldn't be tripping over each other," he said. "The idea became that they'd be surprised by mine, and I'd be surprised by theirs. I know that theirs takes place right after DUSK TILL DAWN. It's kind of a RESERVOIR DOGS vampire movie, because it's like a group of robbers who become infected with vampirism after one of them visits the bar."

One of the biggest questions

surrounding both movies has been their release. Dimension Films, the genre division of Miramax, has not decided whether the films will go direct to video or get theatrical distribution. "Originally, they were going to be straight-to-video sequels," said Rodriguez. "Usually, straight-to-video movies belong straight-to-video because they're pretty terrible. We said we should take our movies and make sure they're really good, so people would look forward to Dimension Films straight-to-video releases. This also gives us a lot more storytelling freedom because you know what the market is and you can certainly do it for the budget that you need to make it profitable. It ends up being a worthwhile business and a great way to cultivate new directors and just tell stories that don't have to appeal to everyone like a feature release."

"But apparently, they've been coming out really good, so now Dimension is like, 'Let's wait and look at them at the end because we might want to release one or both of them theatrically.' That's the only danger with this whole concept: if you make them too good, then they'll want to put them out in the theater." □

"Beowulf" to the Max

by John Thonen

Miramax's genre specialty label, Dimension Pictures, recently acquired U.S. distribution rights to the \$20-million science-fiction-action film, BEOWULF. The large-scale, effects-driven film was produced by Grendel Productions, a joint venture of Larry Kasanoff's Threshold Entertainment in conjunction with Kushner-Locke. The producer was Allison Savitch, who handled the same duties for Threshold's MORTAL KOMBAT films. Christopher Lambert (THE HUNTED) stars, under the direction of Graham Baker (ALIEN NATION). The film was shot in Rumania at studios jointly owned by Charles Band's Amazing Fantasy and Kushner-Locke, who will handle all non-U.S. distribution.

Publicity materials cite the film's basis as ancient Norse legends—which may or may not refer to the well known poem, circa A.D. 700, of the same title. That literary classic tells of a warrior's battle against a fearsome beast, Grendel. This version finds Beowulf (Lambert) an "eternal warrior, destined to fight evil wherever it is found." Beowulf must battle his way through an army to enter a mysterious castle located on "the edge of nowhere." Filmmakers who have previously worked in Romania generally consider it the perfect setting for such a locale. Kushner-Locke's co-CEO Peter Locke said, "When it comes to shooting a major motion picture, Romania is the most cost-effective place in the world. You don't need a massive American crew because the locals are hard-working and eager to learn about the filmmaking process." Locke estimates the locale saved the film over \$2 million in production costs.

In a move similar to that employed in their MORTAL KOMBAT movies, the film will rely on state-of-the-art visual effects rather than boxoffice names. Outside of the prolific Lambert (whose name guarantees foreign boxoffice), the only moderately familiar faces are Rhona Mitra (the model for the Tomb Raider video game's Lara Croft) and Gotz Otto, Jonathan Pryce's henchman Stamper in TOMORROW NEVER DIES. □

Short Notes

Jan DeBont (TWISTER) is in talks to direct a remake of THE HAUNTING, the 1963 classic inspired by Shirley Jackson's novel *The Haunting of Hill House*. The project is at DreamWorks, which acquired the rights after an aborted attempt by Wes Craven to helm a remake for Dimension. ☞ Director **Michael Apted** is in negotiation to direct United Artists' next James Bond film. ☞ 20th Century has acquired the rights to film THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN, based on the graphic novel by **Alan Moore**. No cast has been set yet, but the characters of the Victorian Era fantasy include Allan Quartermain, Dr. Henry Jekyll, Captain Nemo, John Griffin (the Invisible Man), and (Dracula's would-be victim) Mina Harker. ☞ Director **Randal Kleiser** (HONEY, I BLEW UP THE KIDS) has blasted-off from development of MUPPETS IN SPACE, to be replaced by **Tim Hill**. □

A NEW MILLENNIUM

Chris Carter on returning to the tragic tone of the show's first season.

by Frank Barron

Fox TV's MILLENNIUM is a dark and disturbing mixture of detection, fantasy, and horror. As creator-producer Chris Carter described it: "The reason that MILLENNIUM is even a show is because there were human monsters that you couldn't do on X-FILES that were really interesting to me as a storyteller. And I think that's what it will continue to be. That's what makes the show scary, I think—scarier than X-FILES, in a way, because the monsters are all too real." (Carter is, presumably, referring to the show's serial-killers, not the demons who popped up in last season's episode, "Somehow, Satan Got Behind Me.")

MILLENNIUM, Carter added, "is an exploration of evil, so the idea that evil has a face or a personification, plays into it well. It's actually got a very good hardcore audience. It is, in a way, the cult show that X-FILES used to be, and I'd like to see if this year we might not expand on that and build a bigger audience." Carter admitted that the show has to create its audience, because on Friday nights "you cannot steal an audience. You've got to make people stay home to watch those shows. And I think that's what



Carter feels that MILLENNIUM's second season—which featured more humorous change-of-pace episodes like "Jose Chung's Doomsday Defense" (above)—"lost some of what worked about the show in the first season."

we have to do this year. If people come back this year, they're going to see a better and a little bit different kind of storytelling." He also mentioned that there is a slight possibility of a crossover between the two shows, even though MILLENNIUM remains in Vancouver, while THE X-FILES has moved to Hollywood for its current season.

Executive producer Michael

Duggan insists that the show will remain "thought-provoking. It's definitely going to stay scary at times. I think 'thought-provoking' and 'scary' are two words that will be interchangeable."

The series will change in tone, Carter explained, because "what happened is that everyone reacted to the so-called 'serial killer of the week' criticism of the first year, when we were really trying to find ways to tell stories about human tragedy. By trying to explore the mythology, it lost some of what I felt worked about the show in the first season." He also noted that the series will be more about "what happens when bad things happen to good people. That's the kind of story we will explore, and I would like to see if they can have some relevance in the relation to the world we live in. I felt the mythology sort of moved away from that; in a way, that kind of gave it a fictional distance."

As for any further X-FILES features, Carter acknowledged that 20th Century Fox had asked about the possibility of a second film, "so I guess they're serious about it. I have no idea. It's just something to think about and to consider, and I don't want to let anything suffer for any of these new projects. I don't even want to think about it until the time comes to think about it." □

Obituary

by Jay Stevenson

E.G. Marshall

The 88-year-old actor died in August after a short illness. He played a wide variety of roles on stage (*Waiting for Godot*), screen (TWELVE ANGRY MEN), and TV (THE DEFENDERS), but he also made several high-profile genre appearances, where his dignified manner effectively contrasted with the fanciful plots. His horror and fantasy credits include the telefilm VAMPIRE (1980) with Jason Miller and Richard Lynch; SUPERMAN II; "They're Creeping Up on You," the final segment of the George Romero-Stephen King anthology horror film CREEPSHOW (1982); and lastly in Romero's segment of the two-part Poe anthology, TWO EVIL EYES (1990).

John Nicoletta

The film and TV director and producer died this spring, at the age of 52. Among credits including MIAMI VICE and NASH BRIDGES, his one genre film was KULL THE CONQUEROR, recipient of a CFQ cover story last year. □



Production Starts

BRINGING OUT THE DEAD

Director Martin Scorsese and writer Paul Schrader (the team behind TAXI DRIVER) reunite for this film about a burned-out paramedic who is (psychologically?) haunted by the people he couldn't save. Nicolas Cage stars, along with his wife Patricia Arquette.

INSPECTOR GADGET

Matthew Broderick stars in the live-action adaptation of the children's cartoon character. Rupert Everett (CEMETERY MAN) and Dabney Coleman co-star.

THE SIXTH SENSE

Bruce Willis (ARMAGEDDON) stars in this psychic thriller written and directed by M. Night Shyamalan, who earned critical kudos this year with WIDE AWAKE.

Riders on the Storm

by Miles Wood

American Fant-Asia fans rejoice: after a long dry spell, Golden Harvest (the company behind Tsui Hark's seminal ZU: WARRIORS OF THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN) recently released THE STORM RIDERS, a special-effects driven fantasy-epic with a period setting. The story follows the friendship and rivalry between two swordsmen, Wind (Ekin Cheng) and Cloud (Aaron Kwok), brought up together by a ruthless warlord (Sonny Chiba) to help him fulfill a fortune-teller's prophecy of world conquest. Caught between them is the woman they both love, the warlord's daughter (Kristy Yeung). The film is currently playing at local U.S. theatres catering to Chinese-American neighborhoods; expect more high-profile screenings at festivals and art houses in the coming months.

After a record-breaking opening weekend at the Hong Kong box office (besting THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK), THE STORM RIDERS has now taken over \$40-million dollars, easing into 15th place in the all-time ranking and providing new optimism and stimuli for Golden Harvest, once the leader of a glorious and prolific film industry that is currently in a state of decline. Asked if he expected such a response to the film, producer Manfred Wong said that hard work brings rewards: "We gave 200% of ourselves to this film, and while we could not anticipate such a success, we knew it would not flop." □

CARRIE 2

If you think Carrie was a scary prom date, meet Rachel.

**PREVIEW BY
WILLIAM WILSON GOODSON JR**

In 1976 Steven King's first novel *Carrie* was made into a film by director Brian De Palma, and a major multimedia horror empire was founded. Now United Artists is converting CARRIE from one tormented female high school student into a horror franchise with CARRIE II. The studio, which released the original, is making the sequel without any input from King.

Scenewriter Rafael Moreu (HACKERS) points out that Carrie White's telekinetic powers were genetically passed through the female line and manifested themselves only under terrible emotional stress. The lead character in his script, Rachel, is a relative of Carrie and will "follow a similar emotional trajectory to the character in the original, who has all this armor to protect herself. Just when she finally gets it all off and breaths a sigh of relief, somebody slices her up."

However, the original character of Carrie was a mousey victim, the constant target of abuse by her religious fanatic mother and high school classmates. According to Moreu, "I wanted to do the kind of character who does piercing and tatoos and is really strong. That strength is her armor."

Amy Irving (CROSSING DELANCY) will reappear as Susan Snell, the only survivor of the earlier film. She has be-

come a high school counselor. Rachel will be played by Emily Bergl, in her first film role. Her chief tormenter will be played by Rachel Blanchard, a Canadian, whom science fiction fans may remember from the TV series WAR OF THE WORLDS.

The film will still climax in a destructive burst of psychic fury as a number of unpleasant characters die for abusing the protagonist. Exactly what they do to set off the massacre is being kept back as a surprise. But according to Ms. Blanchard, "Its nasty; its really, really nasty, different [from the first film] but with the same sense of humiliation."

The director is Roger Corman-alumnus Katt Shea (STRIPPED TO KILL, POISON IVY) who was called in at the last minute to replace a previous director. This is the first time Ms. Shea has helmed a film she has not written. "I was really worried when I first started," she said. "CARRIE is such a classic movie. But I got very lucky; I inherited a cast that's just phenomenal."

As for the appeal of the CARRIE character, Ms. Shea said, "That's an easy one, Carrie is this vulnerable little person who is really mistreated and gets back at them. I think everybody can identify with that." □



Above: Emily Bergl strikes the familiar telekinetic stance as Rachel, a relative of the deceased Carrie White who has inherited the family's psychic gifts. Below: Amy Irving (seated) returns in CARRIE 2, directed by Katt Shea (right).



STAR TREK INSURRECTION

The Next Generation crew contemplates an insurrection against the Federation.

By Anna L. Kaplan

On a cloudy June day, hundreds of cast and crew members working on STAR TREK: INSURRECTION wandered about an idyllic site located near Lake Sherwood in Southern California. Past the construction trailers, enormous makeup and food tents, and up a dirt road was the bucolic Bak'u village, complete with central plaza, dwellings, crops, and even llamas, or whatever the Bak'u call their beasts of burden. On close inspection, the vegetables were not real, but the llamas were, rendered two-tone to make them look other-worldly. Into the center of the village stepped Captain Picard (Patrick Stewart) and Data (Brent Spiner) in Starfleet uniforms. Director Jonathan Frakes (Commander Riker) and cinematographer Matthew Leonetti, as well as countless crew, were hidden behind the outer walls of the plaza so they could complete a 360 degree shot of Picard and Data, joined by guest star Donna Murphy as Anij. When the small army of people working on this movie popped out from behind cover, the illusion of the village disappeared. They were filming a key scene, when Picard and Data discover a threat to the Bak'u.

The company was nearing the end of principal photography, which began at the end of March in 1998. El Niño-related rain caused a few days delay at the Bak'u village; otherwise, the production was on schedule. Reports of trouble on the set and behind-the-scenes fighting certainly could not be confirmed by a visit on this day. Frakes and Stewart were constantly engaged in playful banter. For example, when Stewart started to talk, he said, "Johnnie, I'm giving an interview? I just made a crack about Penn State. Is that OK?" Frakes



As in the previous film, Worf (Michael Dorn), who left the Enterprise to join the crew of DEEP SPACE NINE, rejoins his old comrades, including Data (Brent Spiner).

replied, "Be my guest. It wasn't Penn I went to, you know." (For the record, Frakes received his undergraduate degree in theater arts from Penn State University, before going to Harvard for his masters degree.)

In the movie, Picard and crew discover that the planet of the Bak'u, a paradise with rejuvenative powers, is being threatened by an alliance of groups that includes the Federation and a race called the Son'a. Picard must decide whether or not to take arms against the Federation in order to protect the Bak'u. The details of the story have been kept secret, and the set remained closed during most of the film shoot. Anthony Zerbe plays Starfleet Admiral Dougherty, while Oscar winner F. Murray Abraham was cast as the villain Ru'afo, the leader of the Son'a. The appearance of the Son'a, featuring makeup by Michael Westmore, was also kept secret, although descriptions of the Son'a could be easily obtained on the Internet.

Much of the movie takes place on the planet, as different a location as imaginable from the Borgified sets of STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT. There was a deliberate

intention to keep this film lighter in tone than its predecessors. "It has a gentle tone to much of it, a lot of humor, a lot of fun," explained Stewart. "Very early on, I said, 'I feel this should be the movie in which the Enterprise crew is seen to be having some fun.' The last two movies have been so intense. I also wanted a romantic storyline for Picard, one that would go a little bit further than the respectful but uncommitted relationship between Lily (Alfre Woodard) and Picard, in the last film." He laughed, "This time, yes [there is] romance. Well at least there is for the Captain, but who cares about anyone else?"

Picard becomes romantically involved with Anij, one of the leaders of the Bak'u, played by Murphy. Said Stewart, "Didn't I get lucky with the beautiful and wonderful Donna Murphy, of whom I was a fan before I knew she was doing this? I had seen her twice on the Broadway stage, in both her Tony-winning performances. So it was a big thrill when she was cast. There is a strongly developing romantic storyline."

Murphy, best known for her Tony winning roles in *The King and I* and *Passion*, will also be appearing in THE ASTRO-NAUT'S WIFE later this year. She seemed thrilled to be cast as Picard's love interest in STAR TREK: INSURRECTION, saying, "It's nice work if you can get it. It has been delicious. I'm a lucky gal."

Rumor has it that romance is also in store again for Commander Riker and Counselor Troi, something fans have been awaiting for years. Frakes pulled double duty, playing Riker as well as directing, just as he did in STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT. Even while hard at work overseeing Stewart, Spiner and Murphy doing their scenes in the village, Frakes laughed and threw out



Picard (Stewart) and Dr. Crusher (Gates McFadden) must decide whether to take arms against the Federation.

“It has a gentle tone, a lot of humor. I felt this should be the movie in which the Enterprise crew is seen to be having some fun.”

—Actor Patrick Stewart—

jokes at every opportunity, keeping the mood light and the energy level high.

“Patrick is the most bodacious man in the universe,” Frakes declared, adding, “His fan club starts with those who work with him”—a quote which he wanted attributed to script supervisor Judy Brown.

Stewart’s reaction? “That’s eloquent, imaginative and true,” he laughed.

Although the scene being filmed with Picard, Anij, and Data appeared to take place in the central Bak’u plaza, in fact the three have just discovered a ship containing a holographic duplicate of the village. They are inside the hologram, wondering why anyone would create such a thing, perhaps with the intention of moving the Bak’u without their realizing it. Anij knows why someone might do this, but as yet she is not ready to trust Picard or Data. Director Frakes watched Murphy’s performance carefully to make sure that the camera captured the fact that she was thinking about this and registering understanding. Said Murphy, “Her wheels are turning. She’s speculating. I think she’s also thinking about not only why people would want to move them, but who it might be.”

When someone opens fire on the trio in the holographic representation, the grid will be revealed. This means the scene will need visual effects added, including openings in the hologrid, phaser fire, enhanced explosions, and the group exiting the ship. Some of the scene was played in front of a blue-screen in an entryway; other parts involved squib hits and pyrotechnics on the set. The only real tension visible on this day appeared when Stewart and Spiner were filming a scene that required stunts and an explosion in the central well, when safety concerns had to be taken seriously. Visual effects supervisors and special effects technicians were close at hand.

Not all the movie takes place on the planet. The Enterprise-E arrives to investigate this situation. Eventually the Enterprise, commanded by Riker, winds up in a space battle. Santa Barbara Studios, who did the title sequence for VOYAGER as well as other TREK work, will be creating the space sequences in the digital domain. The Enterprise-E was rendered as a computer model for FIRST CONTACT by ILM. Producer Peter Lauritson, who does the same for VOYAGER and DEEP SPACE NINE, is coordinating all the visual effects and post-production work for the movie.

The visual effects teams were excited that they would be designing new weapons fire, the transporting effect, and other devices for the Son’a. Jim Rygiel, visual effects supervisor for Blue Sky/VIFX ex-

plained that they would be working on scenes involving the Bak’u and the Son’a. He said, “We have over 200 shots, all the planet-based shots. Most of this movie takes place on the planet. One alien culture teams up with the Federation, and they try to take this planet. They want to move the people living there off the planet and onto another one. The way they plan to do this, is to take the people on the planet and put them on this big holoship that’s in the middle of this lake, which is what we are shooting now, the interior of the holoship. We’re going to be doing a hologrid in this shot. We’ll be adding that. They are going to be doing a battle. There is going to be a lot of phaser fire. Any place where they are fighting with phasers, we are adding the phaser fire.”

Actor Brent Spiner, once again suffering with his yellow contact lenses as Data, enjoyed the village shoot except for his makeup, which is harder to work with on location. When asked about the curse of STAR TREK odd-numbered movies, and whether or not the cast and crew were worried about it, he laughed, “I’ve heard of that. I think they would worry if we were doing an even-numbered film, and we knew it was horrible while we were doing it. I think that would be a concern. But I don’t think anybody is really thinking about that.” □

The bucolic Bak’u village becomes the target of an alliance that includes the Federation in INSURRECTION.





I STILL

KNOW W

Old sins return

By Mitch Persons

"I still know..."

Just as young Julie James was about to step into the locker room shower, she saw the message written in steam on the inside of the door. An eighth of a second later, the apparent writer of the missive lunged right through the door and attacked her.

Thus, amid a barrage of broken glass and screams, last year's mega-hit shocker, *I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER*, ended. On November 20, viewers are going to have a chance to find out what happened to the hapless Julie (Jennifer Love Hewitt) in the sequel. Appropriately titled *I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER*, Columbia Pictures/Mandalay Entertainment/Original Films' release is being produced by Neal H. Moritz, Bill Beasley, Stokely Chaffin, and Erik Feig.

"Audiences of *I STILL KNOW* are in for a some surprises," says Feig. "One of them is that our screenwriter, Trey Callaway, starts the story off at a different point than where the first one concluded."

"We do go in an unexpected direction," affirms Feig's sole female colleague, Stokely Chaffin, "but we knew that there was a question of 'what the hell was that?' and we had to address it."

"What we've done," continues Feig, "is explain that Julie has been going through severe trauma, and has been experiencing recurring nightmares. One of those nightmares is where the stalker she believes she murdered, the fisherman Ben Willis, who was played by Muse Watson, is jumping out of the shower at her. So, although it appears that Julie was disposed of in the last film, in reality, the incident was actually a manifestation of her rising paranoia.

"Julie is such an emotional wreck that she turns to her best friend, Karla Wilson, played by Brandy, for some solace. It just so happens that Karla has won an all-expense-paid vacation for four to the Bahamas, so Julie decides to go along and perhaps get the memory of Ben Willis out of her mind.

"Julie and Karla, accompanied by their current flames, go off to this resort, and things start to go terribly wrong, first from

Killer-stalker Ben Willis (Muse Watson) returns to menace Jennifer Love Hewitt and friends in the sequel to *I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER*.

WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER

with a vengeance in deadly summer sequel.

just the weather. A storm picks up, and they're isolated, cut off from everyone else, and then, of course, the stalker, or what looks to be the stalker's work, returns. The four teens, plus the hotel's bartender, Nancy, find themselves pursued by this vicious stalker again."

"On the surface, *I STILL KNOW* may sound like a clone of *LAST SUMMER*," Chaffin says with a grin, "but the two films are worlds apart. Jennifer Love Hewitt and Freddie Prinze, Jr. are reprising their roles as Julie and her boyfriend Ray, but we now have Matthew Settle playing Will Benson, an old chum of Julie's, Mekhi Phifer playing Karla's beau Tyrell Martin, and Jennifer Esposito appearing as Nancy the bartender. Plus there is a thread of the surreal weaving in and out of the story. Is what seems to be happening really happening? How much of what is going on is a projection of Julie's distressed emotional state? Then there is the added element of, believe it or not, a love story.

"What we wanted to do with this love story is make a tale in which two characters, Julie and Ray, are split apart and then are brought back together. There was a definite reason for that. Nothing is more boring, in a way, than to see two lovers start off in a movie together. People want to see them gradually drift to one another. What we did was take the leap that in the year since the death of Ben Willis Julie and Ray have had problems. The trauma and the memory of what happened has affected them both in lots of ways, and driven them apart, and so in *I STILL KNOW* we start off with the two of them living in different cities. Through a series of circumstances, Ray finds himself once again near Julie, where he has to both save the day and win Julie back. I am not saying that *I STILL KNOW* is strictly a love story—I don't think audiences would stand for



Survivor Julie James (Jennifer Love Hewitt, right) is joined for another round of deadly stalkings by Karla Wilson (singer-turned-actress Brandy, left).

that, given the expectation—but there is that presence of tension, of doubt, and then of reconciliation that all great love stories have, and of course, there is that great romantic Caribbean location."

I STILL KNOW's director, Danny Cannon (*JUDGE DREDD*), shares Chaffin's feelings on the exotic location. "Yes, I do have to admit that there is something very sexual about Caribbean stuff, even though Mexico is filling in for the Bahamas. But let's not forget that *I STILL KNOW* has more to do with fear and trembling than it does with romance and love. As an example, the hotel where the four friends are staying appears to be a lover's paradise, a balm that is set away from the troubles of the world. But when mysterious things start to happen, and then when this killer

storm hits, the hotel ceases to be protective. It becomes sinister and evil.

"The idea of a residence being menacing has been a pet project of mine for a long time, because I've always been fascinated by the haunted house idea. I wanted to stay away from the typical film haunted house, though. You know the kind I'm talking about: some gothic monstrosity with turrets and gloomy clouds constantly hovering overhead. I had to try something different. There were some films, like *THE GHOST BREAKERS*, or its remake, *SCARED STIFF*, that used spooky tropical locations, but those films go back 40 years or more. The hotel in *I STILL KNOW* is Bahamas colonial, very Hemingway-ish, yet with a very discernible air of evil.

"We had to look high and low for a hotel that would have that specific sinister atmosphere. We finally found one on location in Mexico. It actually is a very historic place. It was built by a Mexican general, and was quite a showplace until it was almost destroyed in an earthquake. When we came upon it, it had been abandoned for

years. It was supposed to have had a very shady past, and when you're inside this place, you're experiencing this location, you know there's something disturbing about it, but you can't quite put your finger on it. It's also like being in the catacombs. So many hallways! You come this way, you go that way, you go there, and then you find that wasn't the way you came in at all. When you try and get out another way, you find yourself back where you started. It is a very odd place.

"The strangeness of the hotel is only one of the devices we use to bring about chills in *I STILL KNOW*. I'm very proud to say that we get scares by never once resorting to CGI or special effects of any kind. I don't believe effects by themselves are scary. Anybody can tell an effect. What's

I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER

JENNIFER LOVE HEWITT

The actress returns for more SUMMER-time blues.

I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER is a lot scarier than I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER," says the large-eyed star of both films, Jennifer Love Hewitt. "In I STILL KNOW we have the advantage of taking a little different route to make it that scary. The first film was so much about unrestrained panic: four normal teenagers who hit this man and then had to deal with the consequences. That movie had to be based on the reality of the situation as much as possible in order for the circumstances to seem scary rather than cheesy. This time we can go away from the immediacy of it, because it's an out of control situation. It's about a man, Ben Willis, who has now taken things on his own, and he's ready to kill some people.

"My character of Julie James has changed, too. In sequels, which I STILL KNOW is, I've always hated that there were the same characters in them; you already knew the lead character, and you had no vested interest in her when she came back the second time, because it was just her again in different clothes with different people. When I met our director, Danny Cannon, I told him I needed his help to make a conscious effort in making Julie James a completely different person so that the audience can love her again like they did in the first movie. So Julie's back, and she's much more paranoid, she's much tougher, she also, at the same time, a lot weaker. Paranoid, though, would probably be the best word to describe her. She's had enough.

"But she's not had enough to where she isn't the so-called organizer of her group of friends, like she was in LAST SUMMER. Now, she's not the organizer because she's the smartest one—she's that way because she's been



Hewitt hopes audiences will connect with her reinterpretation of survivor Julie.

though all this before. She's got a lot to warn these people about. She's got a lot to stop them from taking it not as seriously as they should. She knows what the outcome can be. She knows what happened to her friends, she knows how she felt at the end of that first summer, she knows what the killer is capable of. I think she's there this time with the rest of the group to say, 'Don't take it as lightly as you might.' Ben Willis is not just a man with a hook. He is a vicious, vicious man who can do a lot of terrible things.

"Julie's knowledge of the killer and the way he operates is, I think, a very strong point in the story. The audience just doesn't get to look at a girl who's scared, they actually get to know why

she's scared. You get to know what she's feeling and thinking at every moment. You really are inside her in this movie, and you become her, along with everybody else.

"Audiences are also going to see that Julie is not just simply a scared kid. She's a smart girl with a powerful sense of irony. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if there are parts of this film that people will find funny. I think that being scared, when you're really, really scared, you find that fine line between being scared, terrified, and then horrified. That line between scared and terrified is almost laughable at points, and you try to pull yourself out of it, so you laugh a little. I wouldn't call I STILL KNOW a comedy, not at all, but I

do think that people are going to find different reactions to things, like some truly horrifying events as being funny—nervously funny, that is.

"The ending of the film is something I don't believe anybody is going to be laughing at, though. It's a real shocker. And it's a cliffhanger. Depending on how well I STILL KNOW does at the boxoffice, there just may be a third film in the series—maybe I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER AGAIN?

"Seriously, though, since I STILL KNOW is a horror film, there's always a possibility that people will be coming back. I don't know, however, if I would be returning. I have a real belief in leaving things when they're special, and they mean something to you, and you're really proud of it. I have a very hard time with beating things into the ground just for the sake of beating things into the ground. I think audiences would go to see a third film, but it just wouldn't be the same. They talk about LAST SUMMER right now, and there's an excitement there, there's a 'We really liked that movie. That was a good piece of filmmaking.' I think after those same people see I STILL KNOW they'll be blown away. It's really good, and there'll be a certain specialty to it. If there was a third LAST SUMMER movie, I don't know if they'd walk out of the theater feeling that way. They'd be like, 'Yeah, yeah, that was another I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER.' I don't know if that's always right to do. There are so many films that can be made. Why take the excitement and what makes a movie a movie out of it for the sake of doing that? I'd have to think long and hard about participating in something like that."

Mitch Persons

scary to me is what's happening for real, or what you believe to be happening. I remember, there was one scene at the end of the picture that I wanted to test for a reaction. I sat three of my crew down at a monitor, and played it for them; it was simply action, no superimpositions, nothing, and they jumped right out of their chairs. I looked at them and said, 'That's what we're talking about, here.'

"Another approach we used was taking Julie's previous trauma and making it so disproportionate to the present that very few people believed she even went through it. To me, there's nothing more frightening than being in a position of genuine fear or danger and having the rest of the world doubting you."

"I do believe being thought of as delusional is a universal dread," concurs Erik Feig. "If you remember, in *LAST SUMMER* Sarah Michelle Gellar's character, Helen, was literally screaming danger all the time, and no one listened to her. It eventually cost the lives of innocent people, and finally she lost her own. I think the experience, even to a small extent, has cropped up in just about all of our lives. *I STILL KNOW* plays upon that experience even more than the first film did. Julie is a woman who has cut off her own ordeal. She's with a new set of friends who haven't seen what's happened to her. In *LAST SUMMER* all four teenagers had been through that first horrendous act of dumping the body of Ben Willis together, so whatever happened, even if outlandish, or even if they didn't want to believe it, there was a part of them that did believe it. In *I STILL KNOW*, Julie's whole new group of friends haven't gone through what she's gone through, so when she's talking about this, or when she's seen that, or when she's seeing signs of this, they have no other experience to base that on. They believe her even less than people believed Sarah's character in *LAST SUMMER*. Julie is a woman isolated, alone with her fears, and having people believe her only a little bit too late." □

SUMMER KILLER

THE ONE-ARMED MAN

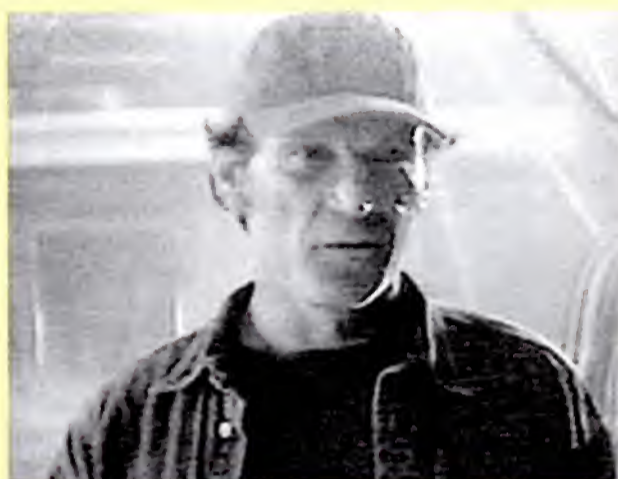
Muse Watson on going M.A.D.D.

Muse Watson, who played the stalker/killer Ben Willis in last year's *I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER* returns on November 20th to once again menace and mangle four teenagers in the sequel, *I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER*.

"Audiences really didn't think that Willis was done away with in the first film," says the solidly-built Watson, "even though it appeared that he drowned, and all that remained of that psychotic fisherman was a hand dangling from a fishing net. That's why I think most people are expecting him, probably everybody but the kids in the story, who are taking this vacation on a paradise resort. They believe that no one knows where they are, and it would be the last place they'd expect Willis to turn up. In fact, Willis used to work at that very resort, and it is kind of a setup that these kids are there."

Watson, who has played the hero Cervantes on stage in *Man of La Mancha*, and has appeared as a totally good, good guy in the film *SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT*, is aware of the impression he has made as Ben Willis. "Ben is probably one of the most frightening psychos since Norman Bates, but as scary as he is, he is nothing compared to the lunatic I played in another movie I did, *ROSEWOOD*. In that film I had to take my head to a really nasty spot.

"*ROSEWOOD* dealt with something that we are all capable of, mob violence, the nastiest part of human behavior, when we all get together, when racism is involved. To me, the killing that I do in *I STILL KNOW* is maybe a three, or



Muse Watson was kept under wraps as the serial killer in *I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER* (above), but for the sequel, the cat's out of the bag.

a four, whereas the lynching, with the mob violence in *ROSEWOOD*, would maybe be a ten. In *ROSEWOOD* I was Henry Andrews, a lynch-mob leader. During a raid on a cabin, I was at the very head of the mob, so I was the first one to get blown away. Up until that point, I was a very nasty guy, one who makes Ben Willis appear like a choir boy.

"Playing villains like Andrews and Willis, though, is not just a matter of portraying a one-dimensional character. My old acting school says, 'When you play a villain, look for the good parts. When you play a good man, look for the bad parts.' Andrews is a superintendent of a mill, and in spite of his bigotry and violence, he is a pretty hard, conscientious worker. In *LAST SUMMER* I went around telling everybody Willis was just an enforcer for Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, because as far as he was concerned, he was justifying his behavior. His daughter had died, and he was distraught over that. She had died at the hand of a young kid who was out drinking, and then these kids, Julie, Helen, and Barry run him over, and just leave like they've done nothing.

"Of course, I'm not justifying this guy's behavior, don't get me

wrong. I'm talking about working on a characterization. There were a lot of ways in my mind that I could bring some realism to it, and bring some dimension and depth to this character. I fought for a little more chance to do that. On *LAST SUMMER*, when we went on Willis' boat, I asked the set decorators, 'I think so much of my daughter. There's a wall where there could be pictures of my daughter and myself fishing on the boat, and everything.' I think it was about a

second and a half in the movie, but I believe it helped to establish the fact that I was a father. Because to me, if I wasn't a father, distraught over the girl's death, then I could have killed six people before this movie ever got started, and I'd be just another serial killer. To add some depth to the role, I asked for this wall to be put up, and it was there, and I think it did help with the character's motivation.

"I had a little more thinking to do about Willis' motivation in *I STILL KNOW*. He had already polished off Helen and Barry, so how was he to justify stalking a whole new group of kids? Finally I realized that at this point, he has become so obsessed, any way of getting to Julie, meaning her friends, people around her, people she gets a ride from, anybody that's around her that he can drive a little more crazy, and get a little closer to her, it's not just a thing of justification anymore. At this point he is totally obsessed—obsessed with making her life miserable, and driving her crazy. And Willis is a little more insane in this film. If you notice, my hair's a little longer, my beard's a little longer, I'm a little less kempt. I've had lots of time to stew. As Cervantes says in *MAN OF LA MANCHA*, 'Go mad!'" **Mitch Persons**

HOUDINI

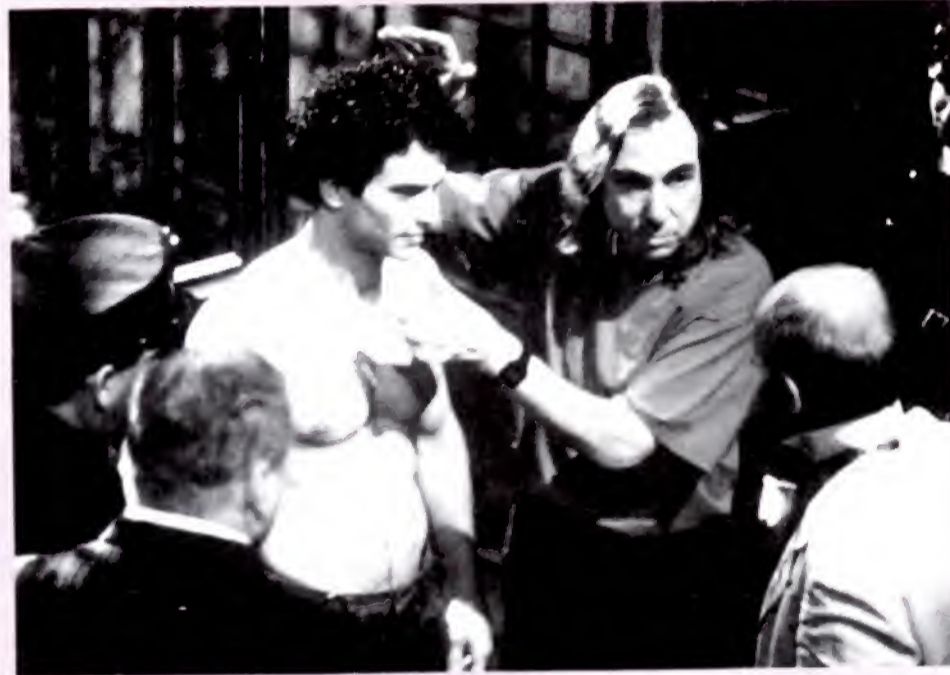
Director Pen Densham explores the master magician's life and afterlife on TNT.

By Dale Kutzera

The world's greatest escape artist, a master of slight of hand, tortured believer in the afterlife, fanatic debunker of psychics and soothsayers—the name Houdini still conjures potent images, even 70 years after his death. No other performer, save perhaps the Beatles in rock music or Balanchine in dance, has cast as long a shadow over a given performing art. Houdini, the icon and the man (who was born Eric Weiss), have fascinated writer-director Pen Densham for years, ever since he made a documentary about magic.

In addition to recreating some of the master's famous escapes for the film, Densham (who is one third of Trilogy Entertainment, the company responsible for resurrecting *THE OUTER LIMITS*) organized the 50th anniversary seance to conjure his spirit. Houdini was a no-show, just as he had been at the yearly seances organized by his wife, Bess, for ten years after his death in 1926. The last of these seances, in 1936, was recorded on acetate record and was something of a media event. Fifty years later, the seances sparked Densham's imagination, resulting in the film *HOUDINI* starring Johnathon Schaech, Stacy Edwards and George Segal. The film airs in December on Turner Network Television.

More than a traditional biography, Densham's film uses the device of this 1936 seance to recount Houdini's life by those who knew him best. In an imaginative twist, Densham places Houdini's spirit as a silent observer of these events. Densham said, "The ending is the most important thing. Great stories have an ending like an orgasm. The story pulses through the eye of a needle, and all the forces come together. This was a way of doing that. If you were to make a seance the reason for the story, you could put all the relatives and friends around the table. Everyone was asked to bring a memento of Houdini. Bess forgot to bring anything, but remembered she was



Director Pen Densham (left) and actor Johnathon Schaech (right) prepare to film a jail escape scene for TNT's fictionalized biography, *HOUDINI*.

wearing his ring. According to myth, the inside of the ring was inscribed 'Believe.'"

Densham has the seance broadcast live on radio, but despite this large audience, Houdini can't communicate from the spirit world and can only stand idly by. "He is doubtful, and thinks he's been tricked, because he can't break through," said Densham. "After everyone leaves, he is left at the table alone and realizes that God beat him. Then the door opens, and Bess returns to pick up the ring she left on the table. She whispers to him, 'Does it matter whether I imagined you or you me?' And he comes up to her and they touch hands. Houdini realizes that all he really wanted to do was touch her. Only they know it happened."

The ending so energized Densham that he wrote a love story between the driven Houdini and Bess, his too-often ignored wife. However, he found studios reticent to green-light his script with rumors circulating about another Houdini film in development. "I found I was getting blocked by the fact that Columbia kept announcing they had Tom Cruise attached to play Houdini," said Densham. "They have been trying to do a Houdini film for as long as I have and kept announcing it, but it was inaccurate information. They were just trying to scare other people off, I believe."

Densham bypassed the feature-film

horse race by taking his script to Turner Network Television, with whom he had worked on the film *BUFFALO SOLDIERS*. Densham was skeptical at first, fearing the cable station would want a standard biographical picture. "They asked for one change," said Densham, "and I thought, 'Oh, here it comes.' They asked me to strengthen Bess's story. They had a couple of really strong suggestions to improve the love story."

Turner originally encouraged Densham to shoot the film in Toronto to take advantage of the lower production costs in Canada. Densham, however, convinced them that shooting in

Los Angeles would actually be cheaper, if he could use the crew from his series *MAGNIFICENT SEVEN*. "I had 56 days [to shoot] *MOLL FLANDERS* and just 30 days [for *HOUDINI*]. That to me is blindingly fast, but these guys weren't intimidated. They had worked together, they were a Swiss watch, and I knew them all so I could be myself."

Densham also utilized a variety of locations in Los Angeles to simulate the ornate world of Houdini's era. Several opulent theaters in the city's once-thriving downtown were used for both performance venues and other locations. One lobby even stood in for the Kaiser's palace. Two eye-popping mansions were used in the film and old-time Chicago was recreated on the Paramount lot.

Densham's goal as a filmmaker is not simply to fill the eye with production design. He strives to tell the story through fascinating visuals, what he calls 'psychic images,' that are intended to convey the emotional subtext of the film. Each scene is carefully planned and storyboarded with visual impact in mind. "You hear stories of how Coppola works on a script as he is directing," Densham marveled. "I don't see how you could do it, especially if you're trying to [shoot] in a heavily visual fashion. Every shot for me is special. I don't think you can sit on a set and come up with what I



Besides recreating Houdini's most famous escapes, Densham also explored his fascination with the afterlife.

call psychic images that have an emotional power, that allow the audience's mind to interpret the imagery. Images decode like puzzles. If you see a fist going out of frame and it comes back all bloody and you hear a baby crying, it is the most terrifying thing you've ever seen. On the other hand if it goes out of frame and comes back and a butterfly emerges from it, the audience knows that fist just caught a butterfly. They will gestalt it rather than showing it, and that's the excitement of our medium. It offers a visionary style of storytelling. We are not seeing that yet. I don't think I'm anywhere near what I would like to see."

In the case of HOUDINI, a man obsessed with death and the afterlife, Densham sought to create a macabre world of gargoyles and specters. "The magicians of that period were often depicted on posters as being in concert with devils, so I'm using that liberally and having creature faces looking at you to create a sense of foreboding. I've also built sets with an image that this man was always on stage. For a jail cell escape, we designed a cell down in a pit and all the other cells are up in a gallery and these guys are looking down on him. I had him die in an operating theater with people watching as he's dying.

"I yearn to make visual movies," Densham continued. "I think the camera is a magical instrument. A lot of films and TV use the camera as a recording medium, but not as a provocative instrument. Only certain shows will allow you to have a man stand next to a gargoyle and have the gargoyle move. It stems from what I

call visual permission to instill a style in the film that carries the audience deeper into the story. It's not style at the expense of the audience, but style that enriches and navigates you into the subtext. I saw this as a dual in the most allegorical sense of a man whose story I tell from beyond his death. Once you have that sense that you are in a spiritually unique storytelling mode, then so many things become valid."

Having lost his own mother at the age of eight, Densham can identify with Houdini's fascination with death and the afterlife. "It's the desire for resurrection," he said. "In many ways he emulates our need to see heroes go down and come back up again. To go the brink of death and hopefully beyond the brink of death, because that is more exciting, more impossible. We all have a morbid curiosity. We all slow down at traffic accidents. It's bred into us. On an evolutionary scale, the animal that ignored how the other animal's demise came about, went around the corner and got eaten by the lion. Whereas cautious animals that learned to have curiosi-

While Densham couldn't feature all of Houdini's bizarre behavior, he hoped to capture the irony of a man who was driven to live up to the myth he'd created about himself.



“The magicians of the period were depicted as being in concert with devils, so I’m using that liberally to create a sense of foreboding.”

—Writer-Director Pen Densham—

ty about other people's death, learned to survive, and they reproduced and their young survived. So that was bred in. Houdini just had an extreme case of it. When he had his father's bones exhumed and moved, he examined the bones and made comments about how good the teeth looked. He lived to go to graveyards and be photographed with the gravestones of famous people. When his mother died he would go to her grave at night and talk to her."

While the film cannot show all of Houdini's bizarre behavior, Densham hopes the film will capture the essential irony of a man who literally invented himself, a man who spent his life on stage and must now become a mere spectator. "He basically created his own myth and had to live up to it. He lived about eight lifetimes. He hardly slept. He consumed books. There are photos of his study stacked with books. He was rigidly competitive. He even tried to get his brother on the circuit so they could own magic. He was constantly doing battle with other magicians."

Densham, perhaps taking a lesson from Houdini's hectic life, planned to take a vacation after completing the months of post-production leading up to the December premiere. "As much of a privilege as it is to make a film, it is also like going to jail," he joked, "and you don't get out until you have served your term."

Of his fascination for the subject, he concluded, "The fact that my mother died when I was eight seems to be a key thing in my creativity. Houdini's mother died and set him on a deep jag. MOLL FLANDERS mother is dead from the beginning of the movie. Robin Hood didn't have a mother. And my scripts always end up with these convulsions of deep dark tears of joy; that keeps coming back and there is a purity to where it comes from. I don't know whether my work is good or bad, but I want it to be good enough to keep going and create the things that excite me." □

BUGS!

The makers of TOY STORY deliver their insect epic.

By Lawrence French

After the critical and financial success of TOY STORY, director John Lasseter has been lording over a busy beehive of activity at Pixar animation studio, where for the last four years over 150 computer artists and technicians have been laboring on A BUG'S LIFE, Pixar's all important sophomore film. Taking inspiration from the Aesop's fable of "The Grasshopper and The Ant," Lasseter and his crew have embarked on a truly colossal undertaking: the making of the first computer animated epic. "Once we got into this and the story evolved," explained Lasseter, "we realized this was a very epic tale, on the scale of LAWRENCE OF ARABIA or BEN-HUR. It's like a spectacle they did in the bygone days of Hollywood. We have hundreds of ants in our crowd shots, and they're not all doing the same action; there's a tremendous amount of acting within the crowd. They're looking in different directions and acting in many different ways." Lasseter's second-in-com-

mand on A BUG'S LIFE is Andrew Stanton, who first began developing the story in 1994, and is also co-director of the film. "In the original fable," said Stanton, "the ants don't come across in the best light. The ants have been working all summer and the grasshopper has been playing, and then when winter comes around, the grasshopper is starving and begging for food. The ants basically shut the door in the grasshopper's face and say, 'You should have been working all summer,' and the grasshopper starves. Even though there's a moral there, the ants don't come across as too nice. So laughing at that, we thought, 'The grasshopper is bigger than the ants; what if he went off and got his buddies and just took the food. So we had an extortionist view of the relationship between the ants and the grasshoppers and played off of that. The movie basically is about this colony of ants, who have been in this extortionist relationship with the grasshoppers for some time. Our main character is Flik, a forward-thinking ant, who's pretty inventive, but his

over-eagerness tends to make him screw things up. He manages to completely destroy the food supply that is expected to go to the grasshoppers. So Flik comes up with the idea of getting some bigger bugs to fend off the grasshoppers. He goes off and gets what he thinks are the roughest, toughest bugs in the world. But what he does, through miscommunication, is hire a bunch of out-of-work bugs from a flea circus, who think they're being hired to perform dinner theater out in the country."

"Having a flea circus was exciting," exclaimed Lasseter, "because it opened the door to all kinds of beautiful bugs. We wanted to have a wide variety of insects, so a circus made perfect sense, because we could pick bugs from anywhere in the world that we thought were interesting and stick them all together. The littlest one of them all is the owner, P.T. Flea, who is a real money-grubbing parasite. From a story standpoint, it was important that the ants could look at this collection of bugs and, for some reason or other, think that they're tough warrior bugs. Many of our choices were obvious, like a praying mantis and a rhino beetle. But we also have a gypsy moth, a caterpillar, a ladybug, a black widow spider, two pillbugs (or roly pollys) and a walking stick." In casting the film, Lasseter and Stanton have come up with an eclectic group of actors, including Kevin Spacey, who plays the menacing Grasshopper bandit, Hopper, and Dave Foley (KIDS IN THE HALL), who plays Flik. Phyllis Diller is the Queen of the ant colony, and Julia Louis-Dreyfus is Princess Atta, who is waiting in the wings to take over the reign of the ant Kingdom from her Mother. Among the circus bugs are Manto the Magnificent, a praying mantis magician, voiced by Jonathan Harris; Madeline Kahn as Gypsy, a moth, who serves as Manny's lovely and beautiful assistant; John Ratzenberger as P.T. Flea; Denis Leary as Francis,



The ant Flik tries to hire warrior bugs to defend his colony but ends up with a flea circus by mistake.





Left: Pixar Animation's follow up to TOY STORY is A BUG'S LIFE, set in a translucent, iridescent insect world. Above: the protagonist is Flik, an ambitious ant who wants to defend his colony against the ravages of marauding grasshoppers.

a male ladybug, who is part of the clown act, and David Hyde Pierce as Slim the walking stick.

As with TOY STORY, Lasseter was looking for a particular subject matter that would work well in computer animation. "Everything we do at Pixar is chosen with the medium in mind," noted the director. "Our main focus is on the story and the characters, but we always choose subject matter that lends itself to the medium, and bugs were a real natural for our medium. Their exoskeletons, the beautiful iridescence of their shells and the transparency and translucency of their wings—all that lends itself beautifully to the medium. And when you get down low and look at the world as they see it, the leaves and grass blades are translucent. It's like they live in a world with stained glass all around them. That's the kind of look we wanted for A BUG'S LIFE." Of course, besides working well in computer animation, bugs are one of the most popular and fascinating things to children—which gives the film a broad base of support among one of its primary audiences. On the other hand, many adults find insects repellent or scary, which posed a design problem. "In general, there's two categories of bugs," said Stanton. "They can be creepy, or there's this childlike fascination with them. We opted to go with the latter route, and worked very hard in taking out what we called the 'ick' factor. We left out mandibles and hairy segmentation, yet tried to keep design qualities and aspects of textures that still made it feel like you were looking at bugs. But we didn't want you to be grossed-out before the movie is over. We want people to like

these characters; we don't want audiences to be turned off by them. The only liberty we gave ourselves was for the grasshoppers. Since they're the bad guys, we allowed a little more of the 'ick' factor to go into their design."

This 'Disneyizing' of the insects may come in for criticism, but Lasseter explained, "We didn't want people to think we were trying to reproduce reality, so we tended to caricature the insects, although we like to make a caricatured world that's very believable. We also were very interested in making a colorful movie. In doing research we found that the world of insects is really very colorful, so we wanted to tap into that. So for all those reasons, we caricature the shape and color of the insects."

Art director Bob Pauley was given the task of designing the majority of the insect characters and had to figure out how to make them tread the fine line between being appealing, while not becoming overly

cute. "We went through a whole process of how to make the bugs look accessible," said Pauley. "Just visually, you really have to empathize with Flik. We did some initial drawings of whether he would be standing up or down, or had four or six legs. We found we could still get enough ant in Flik, without putting six legs on him. He stands upright, but still feels very ant-like. Pretty much all the characters are stylized but still based on the insect. When we had questions about how to construct a bug, we looked to the insect itself. The head, the thorax, the abdomen, or the limbs."

However, in a major break from a usual Disney tradition, there will be no insects singing cheery songs. "With animated feature films it's somehow assumed that to be a success it had to be a musical," said Lasseter. "It's nice to be able to say that isn't quite true. To me, I've always believed that it's not the fact that an animated film is a musical that people enjoy, but the fact that the story is good, and the characters are good." Co-director Stanton added, "I don't think you can do a musical format, unless you really love it, and that's just not our style. It's not inherent in us, and we felt we'd be fighting our natural instincts if that were the structure.

Fortunately, Disney recognized that, and didn't push it on us. So there are no songs in the film, and I certainly don't miss them. And I don't think anybody watching the film will say, 'I wish there were some songs.'"

Of the film's inevitable comparison to TOY STORY, Lasseter said, "The complexity of this film is so much greater than TOY STORY that it's mind boggling. Buzz and Woody were some of the most complex computer models ever created, and every single character in A BUG'S LIFE is more complex than they were. And the number of characters is far greater than in TOY STORY. The scope of this film is huge." □

Three would-be warriors from the flea circus—the character designs and the backgrounds are far more complicated than those of TOY STORY.





Ray Harryhausen (left) and mentor Willis O'Brien, the screen magician who brought KING KONG to life, collaborated on the Oscar-winning special effects of MIGHTY JOE YOUNG in 1948. Artwork by Roger Stine.

MIGHTY JOE YOUNG

A retrospective look at the classic family fantasy film being remade by Disney.

Of the hundreds of fantasy pictures manufactured over the last six decades, only a handful still manage to charm audiences of all ages. One is Korda's *THE THIEF OF BAGHDAD*. Another is Disney's *DARBY O'GILL & THE LITTLE PEOPLE*. Up there on the pantheon is *THE WIZARD OF OZ*. And then there is *MIGHTY JOE YOUNG*. With all due respect to the Tin Man, you have to be heartless not to have a soft spot for this film, or at the very least, unwilling to cast logic to the wind in favor of a rousing good time. Its technical ingenuity speaks for itself, and although the picture asks you to accept the existence of a gorilla who (depending on the scene) happens to be ten feet high, no one is insulting your intelligence. For when all is said and done, *MIGHTY JOE YOUNG* is a fairy tale—brazenly postured in the real world, but a fairy tale nonetheless. One could easily write off the whole idea as absurd, that an ape of surreal proportions could be sedated by his mistress playing 'Beautiful Dreamer' on a grand piano, or humanoid enough to rescue a baby teetering on the ledge of a blazing orphanage. Yet somehow, through the miracle of the production, it works without embarrassment.

Not that it was a cinematic landmark like *KING KONG* or *CITIZEN KANE*. It doesn't pretend to be. *MIGHTY JOE YOUNG* is an arch, garish, amusing, thrilling, heroic,



Actors Terry Moore and Ben Johnson are seen with the animated star of the original *MIGHTY JOE YOUNG*, an enchanting fantasy being remade by Disney.

sometimes corny, and ultimately heartwarming picture. It *dares* you to accept it at face value—Joe, the hyper-glandular simian phenomenon, is no mythic demigod, "just a gorilla" that happened to "grow," giving the story its peculiar schizoid edge. Less than kind critics couldn't resist chucking their spears in 1949, and although they meant it disparagingly, they weren't far off the mark when they called Joe "King Kong for children." Like *Oz*, it was aimed at the young at heart.

It speaks well for Joe that a miniature ape, consisting of sponge rubber and lamb hide fashioned over an articulated metal skeleton, was able to convey a full range of simian and human emotions solely by

hands-on stop motion photography, a process as old as the movies itself. Life was imbued through the magic of the animator's fingertips, tediously and meticulously, frame by frame. Once your eye bought the trick, you were treated to a performance, not a special effect. Joe was a character you could feel for and sympathize with.

Stripped to its bare essentials, *MIGHTY JOE YOUNG* was producer Merian C. Cooper's vision, Ruth Rose Schoedsack's ingenuous, wise-cracking scenario, Willis O'Brien's effects design, and (for the most part) Ray Harryhausen's spectacular animation. The film never professed to be anything more than an extravagant entertainment—"a show to gratify

your curiosity." Yet beneath the visual gags and cheeky '40s dialogue lurk some very dramatic underpinnings, dealing with ruthless exploitation, animal cruelty, and the plight to return to the security of one's own backyard. Only a maverick like Merian Cooper could have marched through the minefields of the front office in 1946 and put this one over for the whopping sum of \$2.5 million, a figure ordinarily reserved for the epics at Paramount, and certainly not for a gorilla picture at RKO. The making of *MIGHTY JOE YOUNG* comprised countless struggles in the technical, personal and political arenas, an odyssey that spanned three years from conception to theatrical release.

Not that the situation was anything new to Cooper. A war hero and motion picture frontiersman, Cooper had the chutzpa to bulldoze a project through studio hierarchy better than anyone. No one could ever accuse him of having compromised on spectacle or showmanship. His credo, 'Make It Bigger,' spoke volumes. "In fact," remarked *JOE YOUNG* cameraman Bert Willis, "the ambition of this man, Merian Cooper, was to make the most outstandingly sensational motion picture ever to come out of Hollywood."

Cooper (with the help of his partner, director Ernest B. "Monte" Schoedsack) realized his dream early when *KING KONG* (1933) scared the daylights out of theatergoers at the height of the Depression. Like his film counterpart Carl Den-

By Paul Mandell

MIGHTY JOE YOUNG

TERRY MOORE

The star of the original reappears in the remake.

RKO's 1949 MIGHTY JOE YOUNG had a kind of innocence that star Terry Moore believes is gone: "Oh, I think kids and everyone have lost that," she said. "Television has taken something away from us that you can never have again." While her original character, Jill, is now played by Charlize Theron, Moore has a cameo in the new film, which she characterized as "kind of tongue in cheek, and like the former Jill. There's a new Jill, but I refer to things that happened in the past, with Mighty Joe Young and me. And if you saw the first MIGHTY JOE YOUNG, you'll get it." She added that she is "really playing myself. I'm like between Terry Moore and the original Jill. I make a remark that refers to the original Jill Young. It's an inside joke that I do with Ray Harryhausen, who made the original gorilla. He's on camera with me." Her part was going to be larger in earlier drafts, she noted, but after changes in director and story, "it ended up I just did a cameo. But I'm so glad to be a part of it."

Recalling her casting in the original, Moore said that producer Merian C. Cooper and director Ernest Schoedsack asked to see her: "So I went over to RKO. Now they had already cast a girl in it, but they asked me if I would run down the lot, so I tore off my shoes and 'ran like a deer,' they said. I came back and they said 'Pay the other girl off. We want you.' I got it by running faster than anybody else!" She noted that Schoedsack directed the film after being blinded in WWII: "He had people around him. John Ford would come in occasionally, but very little. He could just see shadows; he was legally blind. It's so amazing. He's one of the best directors I've ever worked for." Referring to both Cooper and Schoedsack, she said, "You don't meet people like that any more. That was a breed that's gone. Ernest Schoedsack, whom we



Terry Moore (inset) regrettably comforts Joe, who has been brought to civilization to entertain the patrons of a night club, and is kept locked up between shows.

called Monte, had fought with Lawrence of Arabia; he had hunted Bengal tigers; he was a soldier of fortune. And Merian C. Cooper, of course, was General Cooper. They were just so great to work with."

About shooting the first JOE, Moore said, "One of the funniest things was that Harry Ray, my makeup man, was going through alcoholism to the worst extent, and he was totally drunk and passed out in my dressing room every day. I didn't care, and I just let him stay there, because I didn't want to wear makeup anyway. So I did the whole movie without makeup. Ten years later, I saw him on the RKO lot, and he hugged me and said I saved his life, that no other star would have put up with it, and that he had been sober now for five years. He's no longer with us. But he just couldn't get over that I never complained."

Moore also recalled that the original was the first movie for Ben Johnson, who plays Gregg, the cowboy who gets himself a place on the safari to Africa to bring back animals for impresario Max O'Hara's (Robert Armstrong) new nightclub. "He had never done anything before," Moore related. "I said, 'Ben, how did you get into the movies?' and he said, 'You remember that there picture THE OUTLAW?' I said, 'yes,' and thought he was going to say he did a starring role in it, and he said, 'I brought the horses out for that there picture.' He was the champion calf roper of the world. He was so natural and so wonderful, and of course ended up winning an Academy Award [for THE LAST PICTURE SHOW]."

Having seen a trailer for the new MIGHTY JOE YOUNG, Moore was "surprised at how much it stuck to the original." She worked a week on the film, and found the script "very good." One of her scenes is "where the gorilla breaks loose in a nightclub, and

we're all running away from Joe." Moore and the "new Jill" Charlize Theron talked about the project "a lot" said Moore: "She was so friendly and so nice, and so was Bill Paxton. We spent a lot of time together. I even came over and visited with them before I started shooting. They were so sweet, and so anxious to meet me, and really excited about it, the same way when I was making [the original] about meeting Fay Wray. She came over to the set, and I got to meet her. It was very exciting. Of course, she's still living. She's in her nineties."

Her director for the remake, Ron Underwood, inspired Moore's enthusiastic appreciation: "He's a darling, so exceptionally sweet and very good, and always smiling and patient." Being a lover of animals—"especially monkeys and gorillas"—helped make the two JOEs particularly meaningful for Moore. Moore said she loved doing a remake: "I got paid very well, and they were wonderful to me." **Douglas Eby**

COMIC BOOK INSPIRATION

“Our children were reading comic books, when Mirian got the inspiration,” recalled Dorothy Cooper. “He said, ‘I’m going to put a warm-hearted comic book on the screen.’”

ham, Cooper enjoyed money, adventure, fame, and imperial studio clout.

After serving in WWII, Cooper reteamed with his old partner John Ford to produce a new line of pictures for Argosy, an independent outfit they had formed in 1938, when disputes arose with David Selznick over the making of *STAGECOACH*. Ford’s working relationship with Cooper hung on a gentlemen’s agreement to stay out of each other’s hair—something they would chortle over, as Cooper had balded and Ford was losing his. With *THREE GODFATHERS* and *FORT APACHE* in the wings, Ford was on his own turf. Cooper had other ideas.

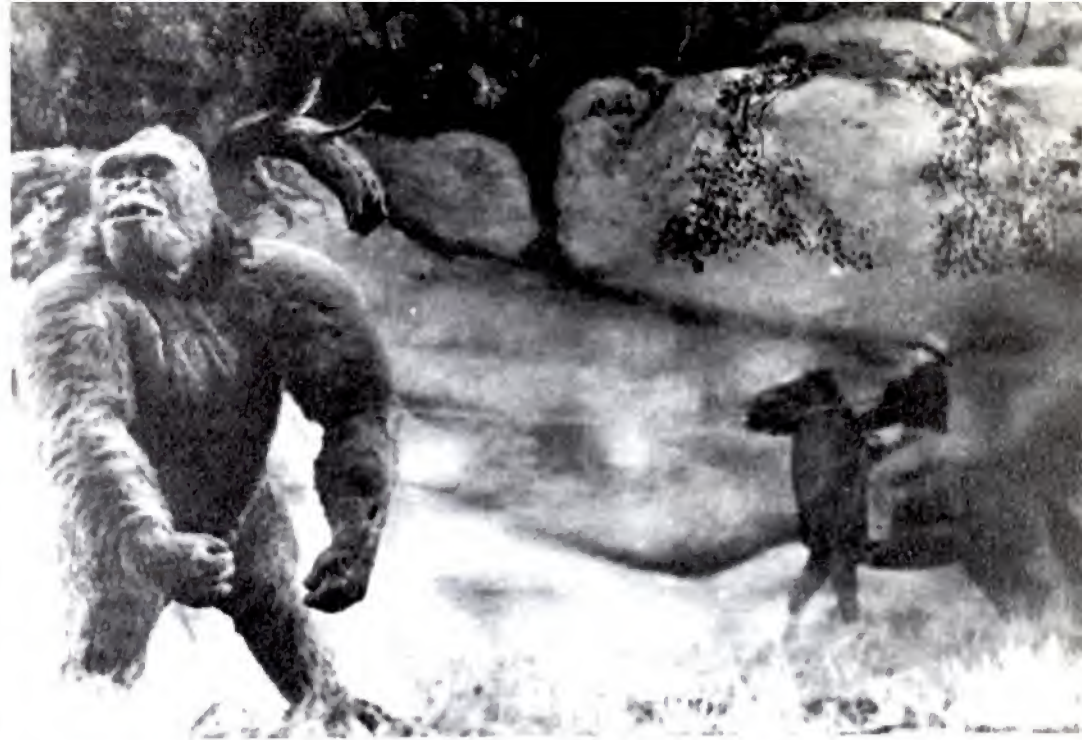
KING KONG was a watershed film. Cooper had yet to top it. Ruminating over his life-long fascination with jungles and simians, he yearned for a project that would recapture KONG’s lost glories, although he was leery of the banalities that made *SON OF KONG* a fiasco. Cooper had a soft spot for *FANTASIA*—he admired Disney’s brilliant use of Technicolor and his eye-popping approach to fantasy. Another stimulus was *THE WIZARD OF OZ*, a film he undoubtedly regarded with envy, as his un-filmed *WAR EAGLES* project had fallen through the cracks at MGM while Mervyn Leroy was prepping *OZ* on the neighboring sound stages. How to combine the charm of Disney and the wonder of *Oz* with the spectacular thrills of *Kong*: the answer was inadvertently supplied by Cooper’s offspring.

“Our children were reading comic books one night which they had collected during the War years,” Dorothy Jordan Cooper reminisced. “Merian had

never seen comic books. It was then that he got the inspiration for *MIGHTY JOE YOUNG*. He said, ‘I’m going to put a warm-hearted comic book on the screen for my children.’ That’s really how the idea started.”

There was also the book *To-toto and I*, written by naturalist Augusta Maria Hoyt and published in 1941. It recounted the author’s rearing of an orphaned baby female gorilla in French Equatorial Africa, which became so humanistic, it mastered domestic tasks and had the run of the house. M’Toto (the Swahili word for baby) was brought to the States where zoologists planned to mate her with Gargantua, the “mightiest of all man apes” then on exhibition. But the coupling never happened, and M’Toto lived out her remaining years on her mistress’s farm. Though Merian Cooper prided himself on his “totally original idea” for *MIGHTY JOE YOUNG*, it’s reasonable to assume that his thinking had been fueled by Hoyt’s book.

Down the road, in a modest Santa Monica apartment, news of Cooper’s project reached the ears of Willis O’Brien. His wife Darlyne recalled, “Cooper had



A man on horseback attempts to rope Joe—a sequence that special effects director Willis O’Brien lifted from his un-filmed dinosaur project, *GWANJI*.

called up OBie and asked him to have a little talk. When he came home, he said that Coop and Monte wanted to make another gorilla picture.” For O’Brien, the prospect of doing a “new” *KING KONG* was a shot in the arm, though he hardly relished the prospect of working again with Schoedsack, who would direct in spite of detached retinas (the result of a high-altitude test flight) that had left him virtually sightless.

Ruth Rose, Schoedsack’s wife and *KONG*’s scriptwriter, was hired to pen the script. After devising a sweet, Utopian storybook prologue, she proceeded to incorporate all the visual gags and dramatic situations brainstormed by OBie and Cooper during the balmy California spring of 1946. Simply titled *Mr. Joseph Young*, the story concerned a seven-foot gorilla who is raised from infancy by a motherless child, Jill Young, on a farm in Kenya. Years later,

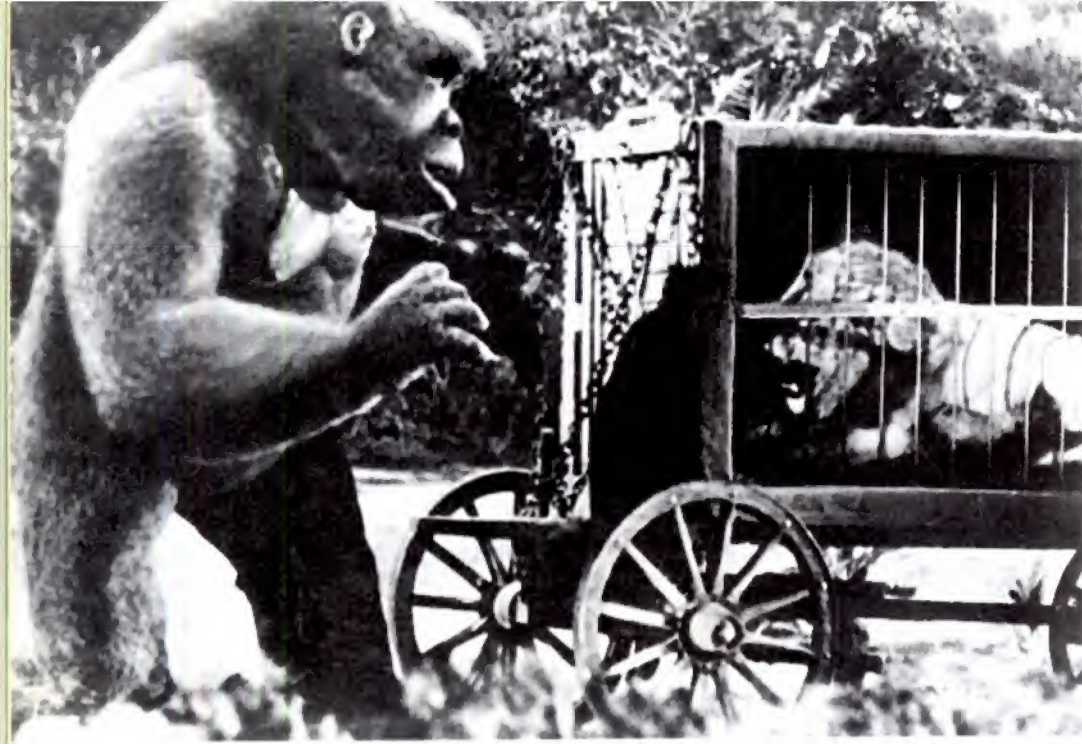
in New York, a hammy theatrical producer, Max O’Hara, bandies together a group of cowboys from a rodeo show in Madison Square Garden to rope wild lions in Africa for use in *The Golden Safari*, a mammoth Hollywood nightclub. After their brutal attempt to rope Joe like a steer, O’Hara fast-talks Jill into putting him on stage, where the ape is shamefully exploited. In his basement lair, Joe gets liquored up by three inebriates and goes on a drunken rampage, razing the club and causing the courts to order his death. Conscience-stricken, O’Hara concocts an intricate escape plan which trucks Joe and Jill to a freighter docked at San Pedro. When they spot a burning orphanage off the Coast road, Joe redeems himself by risking his life to save some children trapped on the roof of the inferno. In the end, Joe and Jill and her cowboy fiance return to her African paradise and live happily ever after.

The treatment, dated August 1, 1946, was true to the film, though the dialogue was too arch and Joe’s actions too cartoonish. The story sobered over the next year while the script, *Mr. Joseph Young of Africa*, underwent nine revisions.

Max O’Hara was Cooper’s second film incarnation: the producer ordered his underlings to “make it bigger,” while O’Hara bellyached that “it isn’t big enough.” Only Ruth Rose had license to parody Cooper, and her penning of O’Hara as “a combination of rubber ball, bulldozer-bounce and overwhelming drive” was a

Ray Harryhausen animates the roping sequence. This publicity shot is a bit of a special effect itself: note the extra hair drawn on Harryhausen’s head.





MIGHTY JOE YOUNG's most complicated effects shot involved the giant ape's assault on a lion cage, utilizing animation and in-camera processes.

trumped-up (if not apt) description of her boss.

Also in the treatment was a sequence in which Joe's African transport plane crash-lands during a thunderstorm on an "un-chartered island." Joe saves the crew from ferocious lions, battling the cats in the midst of repairs. Like the ill-fated spider scenes in *KING KONG*, Cooper felt it stopped the story and discarded it, suggesting that Rose transpose the lion attack to the nightclub. Joe's tug-of-war with an Indian elephant was eventually rewritten to accommodate a team of wrestlers.

For the climax, O'Brien concocted the unlikely idea of having Joe's flight from The Golden Safari culminate in a slugfest with a "competitor's" escaped gorilla on top of a San Francisco cable car. Cooper chose an orphanage blaze, which dramatically made more sense.

One innocently-written item flirted with disaster. In the film, young Jill (played by adorable Lora Lee Michel) stops two passing natives and barter for baby Joe with coins, beads, and her father's flashlight. The last item makes the sale. But in the treatment, and in subsequent scripts, there was no flashlight. Instead, she presents a music box which plays the Stephen Foster tune, *Old Black Joe*. "As the music plays, a little black-faced minstrel figure dressed gaily in stripes, strums at the banjo and shuffles, his feet. The natives watch the figure with eager interest and nod briskly, motioning her toward the basket." The song even provided the name of his title character—

when the father questions Jill about sacrificing her music box, she replies (as written), "Oh, I don't mind. That's why I named him Joe. That's the song that bought him."

Not that this was designed as a racial slur. *Old Black Joe* was a plaintive melody with the charm Cooper wanted to convey, one that used to be sung in elementary schools throughout America. Also, there was no sensitivity to black-face minstrels in the '40s. Still, it was Cooper's blind spot; his musical intentions could be misread. RKO, leery of its implications, suggested that a substitute theme be used a week prior to live-action photography, and Cooper willingly changed it to *Beautiful Dreamer*, another quaint Foster tune which worked wonderfully. The original idea, in hindsight, was painfully naive.

All the while, Willis O'Brien sketched passionately. He pre-

FANTASY VS. REALITY

"JOE YOUNG happened so gradually," said Harryhausen. "I had always harbored visions of jumping into the animation right away, but those visions were dispelled."

pared dozens of thumbnail drawings, along with several charcoals and watercolor paintings. Gleefully, he transposed the roping scene from his abandoned dinosaur project *GWAN-JI*, to an African veldt, substituting Joe for the dinosaur. He also did large renderings of the nightclub rampage, the lion fight, and one of Joe rescuing the orphans. These four major set pieces were key in selling the project to RKO.

On August 3, 1946, Cooper packaged the treatment with samples of OBie's artwork in his Franklin Avenue office, stating in a cover letter to RKO president Peter Rathvon: "It is my conviction that this picture, properly made, will out-gross *KING KONG*, as I believe it will have much greater appeal to women and children, because aside from the thrills and excitement, it has a strong underlying theme and a warm happy ending." He stressed confidentiality: "I don't want it to get about that I am contemplating this type of picture. I want to spring it on the public at a propitious time—not now."

Joe tips the cage of the front-projected lion—an action that had to be meticulously calculated by Ray Harryhausen, who spent over a month working on the shot.



Optimistic, Rathvon communicated with RKO treasurer Norman Freeman for a reaction. Freeman asked to see the cost and profits of *KING KONG* and *SON OF KONG* to establish a budget that would accommodate a year of complicated animation and special visual effects. But the cost figures were out of date, as the jurisdictional labor contracts that arose after WWII had unionized Hollywood, and Cooper, a prime exponent of Technicolor, was hot for shooting *JOE YOUNG* on the relatively new Monopack emulsion. He and Freeman worked up a color budget of \$2,100,000, the expenses of which would be proportionally charged to Argosy and RKO, and an alternate figure of \$1,550,000 for black & white. Both were steep. RKO's faith in Cooper was solid, but it saw the costly project as risky business and opted to go with black & white.

Part of that risk was technical creator Willis O'Brien, on whom the project hinged in the eyes of the studio. His age and physical condition bothered the insurance guarantors. Cooper actually alleged to Peter Rathvon that "should he or O'Brien die or become incapacitated, either man could finish the picture." But Cooper was no technician, and the animation was a problem that would not go away. Unlike *KONG*, which relied more on atmosphere and unrelenting action, *JOE*, by nature of the animal, required clinically smooth animation to maintain an illusion of reality throughout. O'Brien wasn't blind to this. He knew his limitations, and the strain of designing and coordinating the miniatures, mattes, and process work made hands-on animation a dreaded chore.

Enter Ray Harryhausen. The fledgling animator had ap-

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THE REMAKE

Disney revives the giant ape in a high-tech update with a contemporary twist on animal exploitation.

By Douglas Eby

In the 1949 version of *MIGHTY JOE YOUNG*, Jill Young and her pet gorilla Joe are brought from Africa to Hollywood by an entertainment promoter, where Joe is ruthlessly exploited, but manages to escape. In contrast with the classic film, the Disney remake has a very different tone and pacing, according to the script by Lawrence Konner and Mark Rosenthal. Although the basic notion of exploitation may be similar in this new version, it has been updated from an entertainment impresario seeking Joe as a kind of sideshow attraction, to what is a very real contemporary threat for wild animals, namely poachers. The new film was produced by Tom Jacobson and directed by Ron Underwood (*TREMORS*), with live-action gorilla effects by Rick Baker and CGI work by DreamQuest and ILM. Charlize Theron and Bill Paxton star.

According to producer Jacobson, the original film "provided a good story structure in terms of finding this amazing, unique creature in the wild and bringing him to the States, where he finds himself the traditional fish out of water. But the way in which he's found, what he's doing in the relationship with the young woman who finds him, and why they bring him here, and the version of being exploited, what happens to him, is all pretty different, contemporary and hopefully a little more dramatic and real. The original movie's great, but it's of its time."

Jacobson noted that script by Lawrence Konner and Mark Rosenthal was reworked by other writers, but he added that "the basic script is theirs, and one of the things I did was work with them on it. We hired several



The enraged ape rampages through the Hollywood Hills in the contemporary remake.

writers more, after the normal procedure of making a big Hollywood movie. It takes more than one writer or pair of writers."

Director Underwood found the earlier film "a wonderful movie" and noted that his version was "approached in a new way" though with the same main story elements. He commented, "I've been offered many movies to remake over the years, and I never wanted to, because I thought 'Why not the original?' But there's something so primal and basic about this story that's so attractive to me, and it was a film that was so affecting to me when I saw it as a younger person. And I feel it can't really be appreci-

ated today the way it was by audiences in the past."

Underwood thinks this was a good movie to remake "because values have changed a lot since it came out; times have changed, and technology has changed that allows us to make the movie in a more realistic way." Joe was realized with a variety of technology, and Underwood emphasized his intent to make Joe believable: "The concept was to go for a realistic looking gorilla," he said. "And that's what makes it a little different from movies of the past with big gorillas like *KING KONG*. This is a gorilla that is quadruped for the most part, and



In a scene you never saw in the original, Joe goes for a stroll down Hollywood Boulevard.

rises up bipedally on occasion, but not walking around like that. We have a full scale hydraulic creature that Rick Baker created, and it's pretty incredible."

The size of Joe is "bigger than a real gorilla, but not so big as to be unbelievable," Underwood noted. "That's what appealed to me also about it. I felt we could make a film about a gorilla that's special in certain ways. His size is a reason we're making

this movie about him; he's not ordinary, but still in the realm of believability. So we have the full-scale hydraulic ones, and a suit that was worn by John Alexander, an actor who understands gorilla behavior so well. He's played them in many movies, and has worked with Rick Baker in many movies. His experience in primate behavior was really helpful."

One of the themes of the 1949 film was

the level of relationship and bond possible between humans and animals. Underwood said, "That's the central quality of the movie. It's really the relationship between Jill and Joe that makes you care about the characters."

One update is that Jill, now played by Charlize Theron, is the daughter of a primatologist, played by Linda Purl. "She's like a Jane Goodall type person, and we meet them in the prologue," Jacobson noted. "They live in a remote area, and we made up a name, the Pangani Mountains, in central Africa. We didn't want to specify Rwanda or Uganda or whatever, but we hired an expert in Swahili, the language of that area, and the words that she gave us for these different areas are all Swahili words, so Pangani, for instance, means 'place of gentle spirits'—which was neat."

Jill is shown as a passionate, intelligent and independent young woman who easily stands up to authority. It appears from this script that she may be a more fully defined character than in the original, with a more fiery spirit. "We have an incredible actress who plays Jill in this movie, who has wonderful attributes for this part," said Underwood of Theron. "She's incredibly soulful and honest, and that comes across on

Veterinarian Dr. Cecily Banks (Regina King) examines Joe when he is brought to a wildlife preserve by Jill.



screen. And she truly does care a lot about animals, and you sense she cares about Joe, that she believes in Joe and wants to help him. You really get that from her performance. She's going to be one big star. I don't say that loosely. She is the real thing."

The role of Jill in the earlier film was handled by Terry Moore, who has a cameo in the new version, along with Ray Harryhausen: "The two of them appear in a party scene. We have a lot of debt to pay to those who went before us, particularly in this movie. It was great that Ray was part of our film and a visitor on the set. He went out to visit the effects shops, and was a positive spiritual presence on our film. He was our Yoda."

In the new film, Joe is discovered not by a nightclub owner but by a zoologist who works for a conservancy, played by Bill Paxton (TWISTER). Said Jacobson, "He's heard of this legend, and he's also there on a job, doing what they call 'species inventory'—how many of this and how

many of that. He works for a conservancy that is very interested in conserving the animals. So he discovers Joe, who almost kills him, and smashes up the trackers he's with because he feels threatened. Because Joe's exposed now, and he's very valuable, a fifteen-foot-tall, two-thousand-pound gorilla, and it brings back the poachers. Gregg (the zoologist guy) convinces Jill that the only place Joe will be safe is back in the conservancy in America. So that's how he gets to America."

But, he muses, even though Joe "is not being exploited like in the original, as a nightclub attraction, there certainly is the underlying message that it would be better if we could protect Paradise, rather than creating the facsimile of it in Thousand Oaks. So he's not happy, even though the people are good people, that run this conservancy, but he's not in Eden. He's here. So they're not the villain, but there's certainly the subtext that it's not good for Joe. Even though it's not as bold as the original, you feel bad for him; you want him to go home, like ET."

The male lead in the original was Ben Johnson, and Underwood pointed out that Paxton worked with Johnson on his last film: "Bill felt a real strong connection with the original film through Ben. And he has a strong affection for Joe and Jill. There's a romance in the film, and you get that as a very real thing. What I loved about the actors in this movie is that everybody com-

WHY A REMAKE?

"I've been offered many movies to remake, but I always thought, 'Why not the original?'" said Ron Underwood. "But there's something primal about this story that attracted me."



Charlize Theron and Bill Paxton appear with Rick Baker's full-size animatronic ape, used mostly for scenes wherein the human actors had to interact with Joe.

mitted totally to it. You really sense in a movie if the actors are just playing along, because the lines say that, or whether they commit and believe. In this case, Charlize and Bill, and the supporting players, all gave incredibly committed performances to make you believe."

Underwood finds the actor's engagement with their roles is a key to the experience, especially in fantasy films: "I learned that doing TREMORS—that whether you believe came down so much to the performance of the actors believing. For me, that's why I go to movies. I want to believe these people exist, and the outlandish or unbelievable is believable."

The adventure is close to the 1949 film, with the script following Merian C. Cooper's story and the screenplay by Ruth Rose. Underwood said the film has "a considerable amount" of action and that was part of the appeal in making this movie. "There's something so simple and truthful about the story," he said, "I thought it was something audiences would appreciate today. What really appealed to me as filmmaker was making this big-canvas movie, that really is very intimate about a small relationship. It's about real relationships between animals and a young woman, and is set against this canvas of incredible action and adventure. We have Joe being transported through Hollywood in a livestock truck that crashes. Joe has something to do with its collision, and he climbs out of the truck, and goes down

Hollywood Boulevard, and escapes up into the Hollywood Hills, crosses the freeway—there's a lot of big action in it."

Still, the film is not just an upbeat action-adventure. Said Jacobson, "What happens at the beginning, and again this is sort of torn from reality, with these poachers coming into these areas to get gorillas, is that Jill's mother, Ruth, gets killed fending off poachers. At the same time, this band of gorillas is pretty much decimated, and Joe's mother gets killed. This is happening in the prologue, and we fade out with young Joe and young Jill sort of hand in hand, with the man who is going to raise them in the local village. So we establish almost a sibling bond between them. It's tragic, but it's in the best Disney tradition," Jacobson adds with a laugh. "You kill the mom right off the bat."

Jacobson said that the main production challenge was making Joe: "And luckily we had the best people in the world. You know, the interesting thing about the effects in this movie is they're meant to be naturalistic, and our goal was to have people come

out of the theatre, having suspended their disbelief to such an extent that they would say, 'Where did they find that giant gorilla?' The idea was to create a really believable character that you connected with emotionally. And its performance was in the movie, both physically, someone standing there, reacting with him, as well as a character in the world of the movie. So that's writing, you know—coming up with little pieces of business like any character would have, as well as the production itself—jumping through hoops, using any number of techniques to make it work. It involved the Rick Baker suit, the blue-

Alumni from the original, Terry Moore and Ray Harryhausen make a cameo in the remake.



screen compositing, the CG work of Dream Quest and ILM. We used any number of techniques, because Joe's performance called for all of them. We had a giant animatronic Joe that Rick also built, that was used when a character had to touch him, stroke his face. We wouldn't hold on that too long, because he couldn't pick up his arms and legs. And we did closeups of the actor in the suit in a miniature suit, forced perspective, CG—you name it, we did it all."

In terms of what was the most compelling challenge of all these techniques, Jacobson thinks it was probably CGI: "It was about as ambitious as any that's been done, because it's an organic creature; it's got hair, and it's matching a creature that's an actor in a suit, but also everyone sort of has a feeling for what movement is natural. If you're doing an alien bug, you can tell the audience that's what it moves like. But these guys did amazing work to make Joe." Jacobson added that the film is "an adventure movie with effects, but it's telling an emotional story, so I think that's the best combination, where you use the effects and the visual tools of filmmaking to tell a story or create a character that connects with an audience, and believe me, we do these focus groups and people go, 'Joe is an amazing character; you could read on his face everything he was feeling.' And they forget that they're

Director Ron Underwood (TREMORS) poses with stars Charlize Theron and Bill Paxton.



BUILDING A BETTER APE

"The effects in this movie are meant to be naturalistic," said producer Jacobson. "The idea was to create a believable character that you connected with emotionally."



A nifty effects shot flawlessly places Joe within the realistic and recognizable environs of Los Angeles's busy freeway system.

watching some amazing creation of Rick Baker's. And it's a performance that parallels a story. That's what I was excited about."

Regina King, who plays Dr. Cecily Banks (a veterinarian of the fictional Los Angeles Wildlife Conservancy) was also impressed with the work of Baker's shop. She had three scenes where she was "side by side" with the animatronic costume suit, and exclaims, "I have to tell you, it was pretty amazing, because you know it's not real, but the face is so incredible, even to the sweat on the lips. You find yourself between takes looking at it like it's real. They can make the eyebrows and every little piece of his face do something different."

She pointed out the main story line has been changed for current sensibilities: "You just can't feasibly bring a gorilla to America for a nightclub act in the '90s. I don't know how big that would have gone over. So what they did was bring the gorilla here in an attempt to save him, because the silverback gorilla is on the verge of extinction. Where my character picks up is, once the gorilla comes here to California." Though supposedly a member of this real species, Joe is, of course, very unreal in size. "That's a pretty impossible thing. But this is Hollywood," King says.

King saw the earlier version of the film after getting cast, and, along with her husband, appreciated its award-winning effects work: "To think they did that in 1949! I was kind of impressed." One part of working on

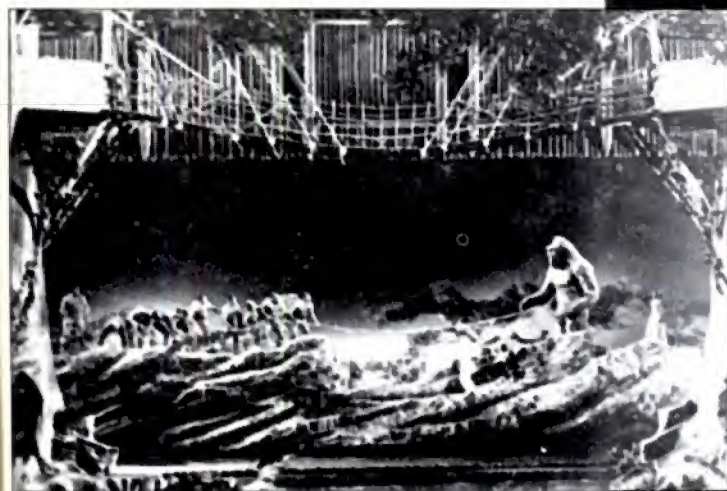
the film that was surprising and helpful for the actress was the bluescreen work: "It's not as easy as you thought. You start to question your talent, because you're not reacting with anything or anyone. So I found myself going back to looking in the mirror and doing facial expressions. When you're doing a scene with someone or something, you just rely on the feeling, so you don't care what the face is doing, because that's going to be there when you're feeling. So this was really 'acting.' It was good for me, kind of like going back to acting class, and just reminding me you can never stop learning. In this business especially. You see people, and they're an incredible actor, and the reason those people continue to be good, even after they've done thirty films, is that they're absorbing every environment or new film that they work on."

In addition to the exceptional size granted Joe through special effects, the new script also lends the ape a mythic stature. In dialogue reminiscent of another gi-

ant ape movie, characters speak about their African trackers being fearful of "N'gai zamu...a great gorilla who will guard the mountain..." Jacobson noted: "We made up the fact that there's been this legend for a hundred years, two hundred years, however long this tribe has been in this area, that there is something called N'Gai Zamu, which means 'sacred guardian of the mountains.' This name wasn't even Swahili, it was more obscure, a local dialect of a tribe there. So this was sort of an Abominable Snowman or Yeti type mystery."

Despite the KONG-ish mythology, this is not "a movie about monsters," Underwood declared. "Maybe about a misunderstood monster. It's a movie about a character who is incredibly ferocious, and very muscular, a wild and uncontrollable animal—except for the control that Jill Young has over him, and that's what's fascinating about it. Everybody looks at Joe as this incredibly dangerous animal, and he is; he can do real damage, and he does. But he can also be a gentle and warm animal, too. It's a great dichotomy which is true with almost all wild animals."

What will make this work for viewers, according to Jacobson, is that Joe is "not just a monster rampaging through the streets. The movie goes to that kind of primal relationship that humans can have with animals. We do care about animals, and we want to believe that even though they're dangerous and ferocious, they do have a soul." □



As part of the night club's show, Joe wages a tug of war against a team of strong men, which leads to a punch in the jaw delivered by heavyweight champ Primo Carnera.

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proached O'Brien during pre-production of *WAR EAGLES* at MGM. He had been goosed by *KING KONG* at age thirteen, an experience that set the course for his earliest experiments, including an ambitious 16mm dinosaur epic he unhumly called *THE EVOLUTION OF THE WORLD*. Impressed, O'Brien gave him his home number and footage of *EVOLUTION* was screened in his living room.

"I was so enthusiastic about Ray's work," Darlyne O'Brien recalled. "He was a very young man then, about 16. After he ran the film, I said 'This is wonderful! Did you do this yourself?' Ray nodded proudly. After he and his parents had gone, OBie looked at me kind of funny and said, 'You realize you're encouraging my competition, don't you?' Not being a cold business person, the thought hadn't even crossed my mind!"

When the seed of *JOE YOUNG* germinated in late 1945, Willis O'Brien chose Harryhausen as his first assis-

tant, who aided his mentor at first by sharpening his pencils, cutting cardboard mattes, and mounting O'Brien's magnificent drawings for Cooper's perusal. "OBie and I had kept in touch over the years, and he kept up on the progression of my work," Ray recalled reverently. "*MIGHTY JOE YOUNG* happened so gradually; I really wasn't aware that it was part of my life-long dream come true. It was one of those events you fantasize about, and when it actually happens, it's far different than you expected. I had always harbored visions of jumping into the animation right away, but those visions were dispelled a year before it actually started. And the picture was on and off so much; OBie and I were never sure if it would ever get off the drawing board! The experience of preproduction planning was

invaluable to me, although the anticipation of it all was probably much more exciting."

Harryhausen will forever talk humbly of Willis O'Brien and the work experience that indeed changed his life. The truth, as far as Cooper and RKO were concerned, was that the 26-year old, non-union "pencil sharpener" quietly proceeded to turn out the most astonishing character animation ever committed to film and virtually saved the show from oblivion.

On May 13, 1947, Argosy Pictures and RKO Radio joined forces to create ARKO, Inc., the production company accountable for *MR. JOSEPH YOUNG OF AFRICA*. According to its terms, Argosy would shoot the film on the Pathe stages and back lot. Financing would be provided by a \$990,000 bank loan made against the picture and ARKO's combined assets of \$460,000. RKO and Argosy agreed to split *JOE*'s profits 50/50, with RKO distributing prints worldwide.

At ARKO's first board meeting, Cooper was made president and John Ford chairman of the board, a background title that suited him just fine, since his

creative participation on *JOE YOUNG* was nil. He would later disclaim any association with it, since a trick gorilla picture was out of his ballpark. His contribution can be summed in the casting of Ben Johnson as Gregg, the male lead, and Ford stock player Jack Pennick as the lumbering truckdriver.

In September, Cooper set up offices for himself and Willis O'Brien at RKO-Pathe, where David O. Selznick had erected his magnificent colonial front in 1935. Gone was the *KONG* wall; it had gone up in flames for the burning of Atlanta in *GONE WITH THE WIND*. In its place, behind Pathe Stage 40, construction of a large rocky outcropping designed by James Basevi was under way—



Left: Ben Johnson and Robert Armstrong talk Jill (Moore) into bringing Joe to the big city. Right: Willis O'Brien with his Oscar for the effects of *MIGHTY JOE YOUNG*.





In the fiery climax, Joe heroically risks his own life while rescuing orphans from a burning building.

the backdrop for Joe's roping scene, which would be filmed as projection plates and fleshed out later with matte paintings. A hangar last used for de Mille's 1926 *KING OF KINGS* was transformed into Stage One, headquarters for stop-motion animation and miniature work. Its ancient glass panels were painted over and covered with tarps to prevent sunlight from spilling into the animation cubicles, which were partitioned off with black velvet drapes.

O'Brien hand-picked most of his technical crew, favoring those with whom he had established successful working relationships. For the unsung heroes of the *KING KONG* fraternity, it was the last roundup.

J. Roy Hunt, first cameraman on Cooper-Schoedsack's *SHE* and *THE LAST DAYS OF POMPEII*, handled the live ac-

tion unit. Ted Cheesman, who cut *KONG* with Archie Marshek, took his place in the editing room. Pete Stich, another *KONG* veteran, painted the miniatures. Lin Dunn, head of RKO's optical department, who in 1932 had convinced O'Brien to do much of his compositing on the printer, enhanced JOE with optical truck-ins and pans, particularly on the matte painting-miniature projection shots that opened the film, and on the orchestra tree huts processed into the nightclub rafters.

On the craft end, Marcel Delgado was indispensable. His brother Victor was assigned to the miniatures shop as a prop maker and test animator. George Lofgren, whose taxidermy skills for *WAR EAGLES* were declared miraculous by Marcel, provided rubberized unborn calf hide for the six Joe

models. His bizarre technique consisted of covering freshly-slaughtered hide with wallpaper paste and placing it in a sealed vat containing ravenous dermestid beetles. After the insects devoured the skin and remnants of flesh, the paste was dissolved and the exposed hair roots were coated with liquid latex. Stretched and combed, they were affixed to the animation puppets. Lofgren's skins resisted fingertip impressions, eliminating the "fur dance" that had plagued Kong's animators.

Stage One buzzed with activity as a remarkable miniature gorilla began to take shape. The Joe Young armature was a concerted effort by Ray Harryhausen and Marcel Delgado—a marvel of design and engineering. Made of milled dural, its appendages contained ball joints that precisely correspond-

ed to simian anatomy. The hips and shoulders used hinges on swivels which eliminated "ball drift" and allowed Harryhausen to perfect Joe's shoulders-back gesture of astonishment that would become a staple of his animation style. Soft wire sections for lip and eyebrow movement were put in, and a thick rotational Allen screw under the chin allowed for near-microscopic jaw movements.

Machinist Harry Cunningham assembled six armatures of various sizes so that animation could progress on different setups simultaneously. The smallest, only four inches high, was used for long shots in the tug-of-war and the orphanage tree climb. Marcel Delgado compared it to a Swiss watch: "You just moved it, and it went where you wanted it to go." Cunningham also built five stop-motion projectors for JOE, one of which was acquired by Harryhausen for *THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS*. He used it ever since.

Rather than resort to a mold,

Far left: O'Brien uses a pencil eraser to animate Joe's eyes for a scene (center) of the ape carrying Jill up a tree in front of the (back-projected) burning orphanage. Below: Joe bellows in fear at the nearing flames.



the Delgado brothers used Marcel's build-up technique to flesh out the Joe maquettes. Foam rubber muscles and wads of cotton were layered over the armatures; Lofgren's hides were stretched over the forms and stitched into place. They also created five animatable humans, two horses, three lions, and a three-inch scale torso figure of Joe intended for the piano sequence but never used, because it looked grotesque.

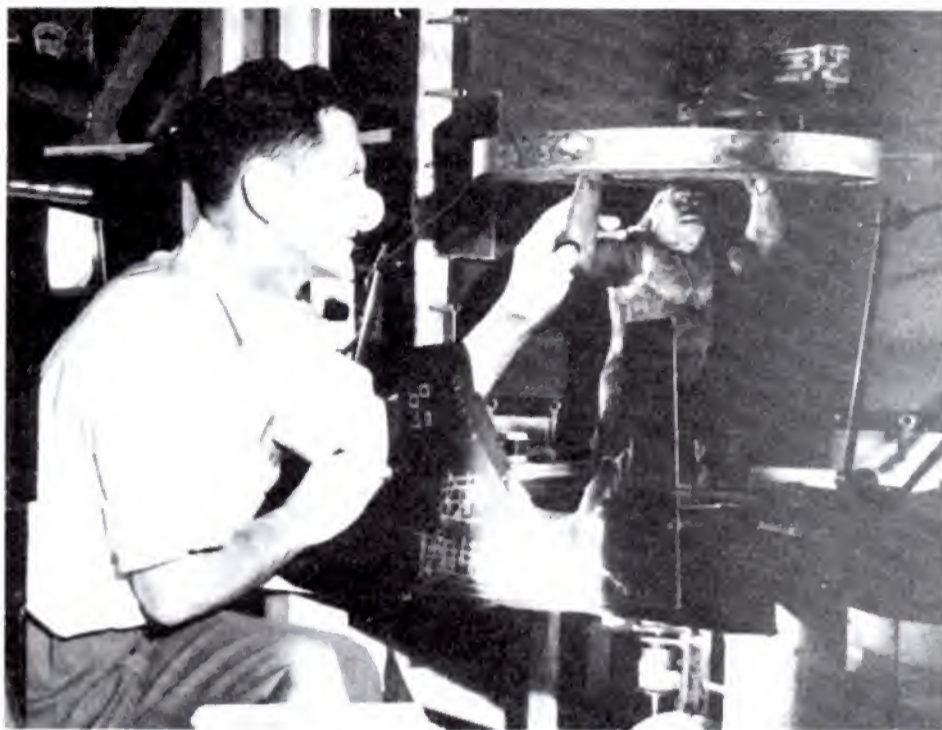
The basic Joe model became a nightmare when its stoutness caused Cooper to bellyache: "less pudgy and cuter" was the demand. After being put through the wringer four times, Marcel, who if anything knew how to make a gorilla, threatened to walk. "As I was fixing it up, I decided that I wasn't going to do a damn thing with it again," he fumed. "I put it on Cooper's desk and said, 'That's it. No more criticisms!' And I walked away. O'Brien didn't have any complaints."



Subsequent overhauls made during animation resulted in Joe's peculiar metamorphoses throughout the film. Wear and tear after countless manipulations demanded that the models be stripped and relayered. Since closeups of Joe used as full-scale rear projection plates needed to be animated first, the model sulking in the basement was visibly different from the wide-eyed "adorable" ones used in the nightclub and orphanage, shot months later. Of the six Joes, Harryhausen favored the one getting intoxicated in his cage, which he brought to life in December 1947. "That was the only figure I felt at home with," he noted. "It's fascinating how one can become attached to a mass of metal and rubber. Maybe it was all in my own mind, but there

BALANCING ACT

At a cost of \$2000, Cooper had a platform built that rotated on support cables for Terry Moore. In animation, a matching miniature was fastened to Joe's hands.



Above: Pete Peterson animates the scene of Joe holding Jill and her piano aloft on stage (right). Left: a close-up of Joe as he listens to Jill play "Beautiful Dreamer," with the rear-projected audience in the background.

was something about this one model that embodied the very essence of gorillahood."

George Webb, a draftsman who had laid out the blueprints for GWANGI's canyon dioramas, filled the post vacated by KONG technician Carol Shephird. "I worked directly with O'Brien in laying out the glass shots, but I was mostly concerned with the miniatures," he explained. "Every glass had to be designed to specific sizes, as did every miniature, including the orphanage and the rock set. We had a book with calculations that dictated the size of the animation tabletops. OBie would do sketches, and I'd figure out the parameters of the small back projections. It was mundane work, but it had to be done."

The lighting cameraman on miniatures was Bert Willis, who went back with O'Brien as far as 1924, when OBie was running the Warners matte department. Bert assisted him on THE LOST WORLD (1925) and was one of many cameramen on KONG. Under O'Brien's baton, he filmed Kong's high-speed plunge down the profile of the

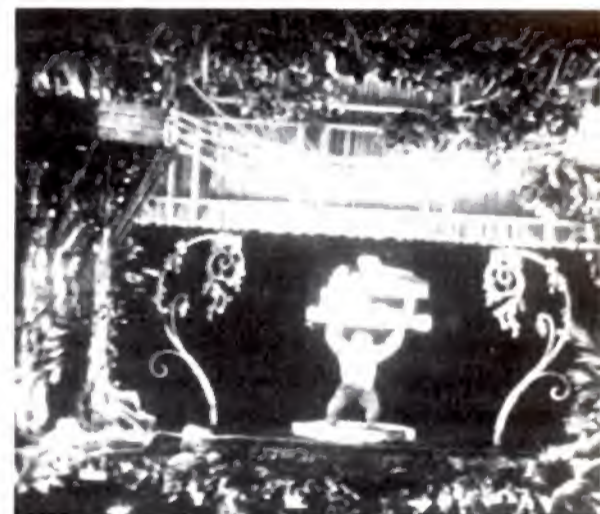
Empire State Building.

"OBie was a fine artist, and an even better cartoonist," said Willis. "We had gobos on the lights and he would doodle all over them with chalk. The scene I was most proud of was the one where Joe knocks over the lion cage, which used front and back projection. I lit that one. Frankly, OBie got me into trouble on several occasions. We'd be shooting, and he'd be, you know, getting juiced up across the street somewhere. I caught heat from Cooper and studio boss Walter Daniels more times than I'd care to remember. But I loved the man. I think I was closer to O'Brien than any other employee."

Bert had several camera assistants under his wing, including Robert Touyarot, Tex Wheaton, Richard Davol, Harold Stine, and Monroe Askins. "There was a darkroom set-up on the stage," Askins recalled. "We'd make hand tests of each setup. We'd go in, unload that strip, process it, print up 5x7's and study it. Ray had a foot pedal on the floor to ad-

vance the camera frame by frame. My job consisted of setting up the Mitchell, tying it down, and making sure that it was running properly." He beamed, "I loved JOE YOUNG. My boys were about five at the time. They created a fantasy thing for me, so I was working on the picture through their eyes. I kind of lived that fantasy through them day by day."

Matte artists functioned as a separate unit under Fitch Fulton, who with Al Simpson had done the glass paintings for GONE WITH THE WIND and other RKO pictures. Fulton selected a capable team of artists consisting of Lou Lichtenfield, Verne Taylor, and Jack Shaw. The matte glasses were 12 feet wide, considerably larger than RKO's standard eight-footers. While Harryhausen animated on a finished setup, other process plates were imaged into "cold" miniature sets behind the drapes, and the matte men would come in and circumscribe the parameters for their



paintings. Their goal was to ready a new animation setup for the next morning and to prepare others for exposure tests.

"Fitch was our head matte painter, a grumpy but lovable old bastard," Lichtenfield mused. "He did the basic design of the setups. He'd do a sketch, and we wouldn't even use an art director; we were on our own. I co-painted the jungles and mountains, and several for the nightclub. The way we worked it, a big glass mountainscape was positioned in back of the set. An intermediate glass had twisted trees and vines. The miniature was on a tabletop in front of that. And in front of that was another glass of foreground rocks and trees. Some-

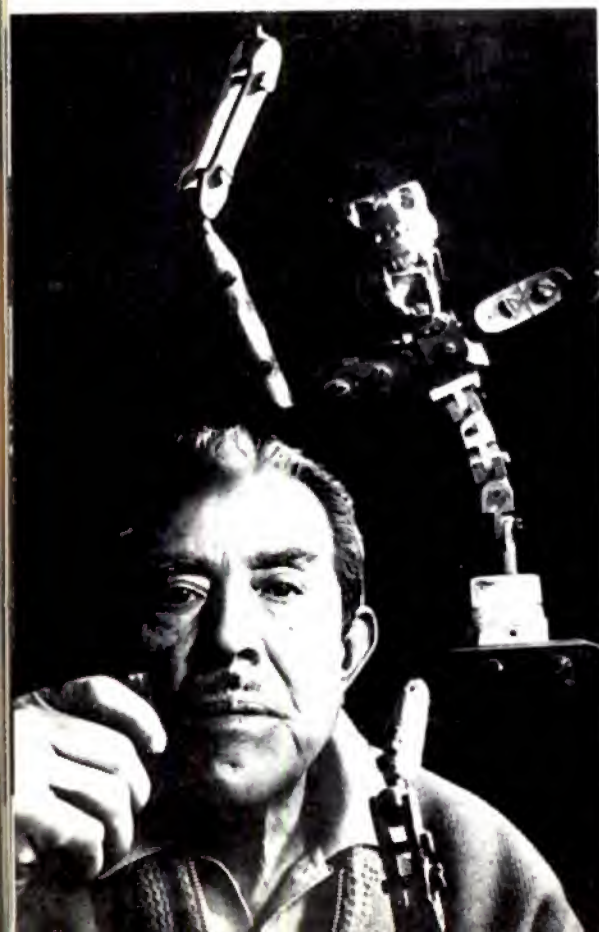
times we'd all work on one simultaneously.

"The one for the rock set was just awful!" he cringingly remembered. "We had just finished one glass. This one in particular was a frontal piece—a lot of work. We didn't want to touch it until the paint was dry, so we left a note on it for the janitor who came in the next morning to clean the glass. Which meant 'Clean off the opening.' He wiped the whole damned thing off, and we had to start from scratch!"

Casting began while John Ford was preparing *SHE WORE A YELLOW RIBBON*. Big name talent was not a consideration; the star, after all, was Joe. \$75,000 covered the voluminous roster; \$204,000 was guesstimated for the animation. (By the end of 1948, the animation figure would skirt one half million.) Robert Armstrong was a natural for Max O'Hara. Seasoned pros Frank McHugh, Regis Toomey, and Denis Green filled out the bill, with some marvelous "drunk" ensemble playing by Douglas Fowley, Paul Guilfoyle and Nestor Paiva. Practically every available stunt double and bit player in Hollywood signed freelance SAG contracts for "Schoedsack Production 615."

Ben Johnson was handed his

Marcel Delgado, who worked with Willis O'Brien on *KING KONG* and *MIGHTY JOE YOUNG*, poses with one of the ape armatures he built.



MAKE IT BIGGER!

"I decided I wasn't going to do a damn thing with it again," said Delgado of redoing the Joe model a fourth time. "I put it on Cooper's desk and said 'That's it. No more criticism!'"



Mad as hell and not going to take it anymore: an enraged Joe finally goes on a rampage after weeks of humiliation on stage at the night club.

role on a silver platter. "I was doubling for Henry Fonda in *FORT APACHE*," the actor recalled in an interview in the '80s, shortly before his death. "During the filming there was a wagon wreck, trapping several people inside. I ran in, stacked it up, and saved their lives. When I got the wreck all squared away, John Ford came down off the parallels and told me that I'd be rewarded. I thought I was gonna get another doubling job. About two weeks later, Ford handed me a seven-year contract. And that was the turning point of my life. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time."

Cooper hired Columbia-contract player Terry Moore at the eleventh hour. Moore, who became the flame of Howard Hughes after he bought RKO in 1948, invested the role with the pouty naivete Cooper was looking for. "Another girl had been signed to play Jill Young," Moore recalled. "When Merian Cooper saw me, he told me to run. And I just ran. Cooper said that I ran like a deer. So they

paid the other girl off and bought me from Columbia."

RKO-Pathé was shut down on November 11, 1947 while the crew high-tailed it to the Goebel Lion Farm in Thousand Oaks to shoot animal plates for the nightclub chaos, under the velvet whip of animal trainer Mel Koontz. Around this time, Harryhausen started animating the delicate scenes of Joe brooding in the basement, beginning with the shot of him knocking over his supper tray to a minor-chord strain of *Beautiful Dreamer*, and proceeding to the drunk scene for the magnified process shots of Joe behind the three inebriates. Joe's facial expressions defy analysis, comparable only to those of the troglodyte and baboon in Harryhausen's own *SINBAD & THE EYE OF THE TIGER*. Armed with a modeling tool, a screwdriver, a surface gauge, and a pencil eraser for eyeball manipulation, he endowed his favorite model with grimaces, pouts, procrastination, and a broad spectrum of nuances that in spots seem more canine than

simian. The slow pace of these shots required the virtual reculping of Joe's face per frame, which he achieved by working bits of modeling clay into the rubber.

How did Harryhausen approach this scene? "That's very difficult to say. You do it by feel, mostly. It's intuitive. It's hard to explain from a technical point of view, because it's something that just comes, if it comes at all. We did shoot footage of Bushman, the gorilla at the Chicago Zoo, just to study the various apish expressions and the synchronization of limbs. But you can't copy it exactly; it's something that you have to be influenced by, nothing more. Obviously, no gorilla could emote the way Joe did. You have to put yourself in the gorilla's place. I remember animating him looking ruefully at the sanitation man outside the cell window and thinking for him, 'How did it ever come to this?!' Of course, the drunk scene offered some wonderful possibilities for interesting patterns of movement. It took a great deal of time just to get in the mood. Luckily, I didn't have to go out and get drunk to do it!" The body language of Joe's stupor is an anthropomorphic wonder. Through Harryhausen's fingertips, Joe rolls his eyes like a befuddled cocker spaniel, belches, crawls up his cell door, and bursts forth in a uncalculated fit of fury when his finger is cruelly burned. Cooper was so stunned by the precision of Harryhausen's work, he promised him a bonus to his \$250 weekly paychecks contingent on his ability to turn out more of the same for the duration of the picture.

On December 10, 1947, cast members assembled on Pathe 12 for day one of the regular production. Shooting began on the farm set of young Jill buying Joe from the natives. Two days later, the company relocated to the 40 Acres Ranch to film action backgrounds for Joe's roping scenes. Schoedsack eased himself back into the director's chair, determined to surmount his failing vision. He could function indoors and only on overcast days. Cooper, O'Brien, and assistant director Sam Ruman stationed them-

selves at Schoedsack's side most of the time but, as Terry Moore asserts, "Monte directed that picture! I don't know how he did it, but he did. Blind people have a sense, a feeling that sighted people never have. He was phenomenal."

Schoedsack couldn't fight daylight, however, so Cooper directed the roping sequence. Stunt riders galloped past the "potato rocks" facade, a company catch-phrase pointing to its protuberous design. When these scenes were backprojected into miniature sets in the spring of 1948, matte painters Fulton and Lichtenfield extended the rocks on glass, creating a storybook African vista.

The horsemen actually roped a bulldozer and several wooden posts, which were obliterated by split-screening the action on either side of the frame. When the doctored scenes showed cowboys slinging lariats into a soft matte line, the model of Joe was positioned in front of the split and animated accordingly. Tiny wire ropes in Joe's hands and around his neck were painstakingly matched by Ray Harryhausen to the projected lariats by eye, completing the illusion. Aligning this through the rackover Mitchell camera wasn't easy.

The sequence called for rear-projected horsemen to appear behind Joe and animated ones to cross in front, circling him posse-style. O'Brien was determined to get his miniature horses in motion personally while Ray animated Joe. For a while, the two functioned that way. The dailies told another story.



Naturalism was an imperative—equine movements could not look fake. O'Brien's animation was bold but clinically deficient in contrast to his protege's. Victor Delgado pitched in, but his scenes didn't cut with the flow. Clearly another pair of talented hands were needed.

The solution came in Pete Peterson, a grip whom O'Brien had befriended. Peterson was a victim of multiple sclerosis, and though his leg muscles were deteriorating, he refused to surrender to the disease. He had been dabbling in stop-motion with a home movie camera through the encouragement of

his wife Jan, who had roto-animated birds in KING KONG. O'Brien gave Peterson one of the Joe models and he filmed it tugging a miniature lion cart. Cooper approved the test, and Peterson became Harryhausen's backup at \$200 a week. Ray and Pete co-animated the horses racing past the setup; what survived of OBie's work consisted of a rider ambling by the lens as Joe gets beaten from behind, and a horseman approaching with Joe blocking the action.

The problem with the roping sequence was not the animation per se, but one of scale. At times the mounted riders were eye level to Joe—OBie had keyed his storyboards to an early script in which the ape stood only seven feet tall. This did not sit well with Cooper, whose battle cry "Make it bigger" boomed continually in the projection room, driving O'Brien to distraction. Unveiled in the nightclub, Joe had grown to Kongish proportions and would continue to fluctuate in stature, dictated by Cooper's dramatic sensibilities. Given the film's overall improbabilia, logic merely intruded on entertainment, anyway.

MIGHTY JOE YOUNG had its share of technical snafu's despite labored pre-planning. Af-

The damsel in distress imagery might have recalled KING KONG, but Joe's real personality is reflected in the image of his heroic rescue efforts.

ter the cowboys fail to rope Joe, he climbs to a commanding position on a rocky ledge, roars in defiance, and plucks O'Hara from his horse. In December 1947, footage of a stunt man performing this action was achieved by rigging his body harness to a pendulum arm that swung from a crane above the 'potato rocks' facade. Months later, the footage was rear-projected a frame at a time below Joe's animation stage. To bridge the section between the stage and the projection, a cutout was bolted to a frame and painted to blend with the rear-screened rocks. Joe's arm was extended downward in front of the painting and animated in concert with the stunt man's swing.

Unfortunately, when Harryhausen was about to stop-frame the scene on June 15, 1948, it became apparent that arc of the swing was too wide—the airborne rider trespassed behind the painted cutout, obliterating his image for forty frames. The setup was frozen, and O'Brien's team passed the aspirin. Harryhausen suggested that photo-

continued on page 59

A Mighty Joe Young armature (left) is seen beside one of the old King Kong armatures, showing the difference in size between the two.



What Dreams May Come...

Visionary director Vincent Ward transports Robin Williams to the Afterlife.

How do you define the term "visionary filmmaker?" Director Vincent Ward is understandably reluctant to supply his own interpretation of the label most often applied to him. Ward, now 42, has just had his fourth film, *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME*, released by Polygram Pictures. He hails from New Zealand, where he trained for six years as a painter at Ililam School of Fine Art in Christchurch. His work is strikingly original, intensely visual—that much is evident from the films themselves. So what are critics getting at when they pigeon-hole Ward with this term?

When pressed, Ward offered, "My films are often about

By Joe Fordham

places and realities that are on the periphery of the intangible. They often have a metaphysical element that's overt in *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME*, but normally not so overt. The films often have some sort of predictive quality to them, like *THE NAVIGATOR* for example, and they often follow threads that are not just one moment in time but perhaps sometimes give a sense of a larger trajectory than is necessarily the norm. It's not just a visual thing."

Ward's interest in fantasy began as a boy growing up on an isolated farm in the south of the

north island of New Zealand. An active imagination led to painting; film-making came out of the Fine Arts program at Ililam at age 21. "Most of my student films were very short animation films that I could never afford to take to the optical stage, but I made two other films that won awards. The first was a fifty-two-minute drama called *A STATE OF SIEGE*, based on a novel by Janet Frame. This won a Golden Hugo at the Chicago Film Festival and the Grand Prix at the Miami Film Festival, even though it was fifty-two minutes competing against full-length features. It was released theatrically as a feature throughout the main cities of New Zealand. That was a big turning point. But then I went away, perversely, for two years and lived in an isolated Maori community. It was just a personal thing, something that I wanted to try to come to grips with."

An odd choice perhaps for a young man raised by an Irish-Catholic father and a German-Jewish mother, with no Maori blood in him at all? Ward explained, "A lot of New Zealanders are concerned with identity, perhaps because it's one of the more recently-formed countries. I realized there was a key part of my country's culture that I really didn't understand, so I went to live in the most traditional heartland of the Maori



Above: director Vincent Ward in

community, where the last of the Maori's wars were fought, where many of the people haven't forgiven the whites."

The experience would spin Ward's life around and ultimately forge with his visual imagination to empower him as a filmmaker. "It was an incredibly primal experience, very harsh. I lived in an area where there was a one-way gravel road going into the bush. There was no running water, no electricity; people still had corrugated iron open fire places in their huts. It was like the wild west. There were a lot of guys with rifles, a lot of shooting accidents—serious ones, where people died. A lot of people were either seeking refuge there because they didn't fit into what we called the Pakeha, the white world, or they were hunters.

"It was both a terrifying and a fantastic experience for me. I literally nearly went crazy. I had my hair shaved off; I had ringworm, conjunctivitis; one time I nearly drowned. I was the only white guy in the community. But there was a kind of honesty and down-to-earth quality that

Annabella Sciorra plays the wife that Williams must rescue from Hell.





interfaces with the computer generated heaven of WHAT DREAMS MAY COME. Below: Chris Neilsen (Robin Williams) and his wife (Sciorra) in the painted world heaven.

you never get in a white European community. People responded very directly to their emotions. I was from an Anglo Saxon heritage where I was taught not to respond immediately to situations, to cover my emotions. I learned things from this ancient culture where parts of life are at the same time sacred and profane—both extremes. For example, the old lady I was living with, every part of her life was this mystical thing. She'd pray over a bottle of water before she drank from it; she'd sit in the back of my van and pray in the way the ancients used to when they travelled over warring tribal lands. Then there was her son who was a paranoid schizophrenic. He would smash up the house with an axe. One time he came after me with an axe. He was the complete opposite of his mother, completely profane, but very funny, very bright."

The experience lead to Ward's second, longer film, a documentary, IN SPRING ONE PLANTS ALONE. Ward describes the results as "a very quiet, gentle film about the



Dreams

PAINTING HEAVEN

Digital techniques realize the unreal.

We wanted to shoot something live action that wasn't a nuisance on set. In most films where they're acting against blue screen, it's really boring for the actor, and it's never as alive. We wanted to shoot this as if you were shooting just a normal hand-held camera."

That was Vincent Ward's brief for the artists and technicians at Mass Illusions in creating Chris Neilson's intensely personal, fluid, living 'painted world' vision of the afterlife in *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME*. Ward had worked with Mass Illusions digital effects supervisors Joel Hynek and Nick Brooks on *MAP OF THE HUMAN HEART*, but visual effects producer Ellen Somers could see they were onto something. "There really was an incredible insight about how to develop a technique to execute what he was looking for, throwing away the traditional standards of how you approach visual effects and the demands that we usually lay on people."

Creatively and technically, a lot was hinging on the technique. Somers elaborated, "If you did not believe, when Robin Williams comes to life in the painted world, that it was a real living world, with life forms that have natural complexity and feeling, then that moment never would have played correctly. If you felt that you were in something that had been gener-



Robin Williams examines a dream-like Rembrandt-inspired heavenly vista created by digital computer technology.

ated with a computer, it never would have achieved that feeling—that 'Oh my God, I'm dead, but, hey, this isn't so bad' feeling. It was also critical to the conditions of the locations in which we were shooting that everything had to be free-flowing, free-moving. This was not stage work. We were standing like mountain goats on the side of mountains."

National Glacier Park, Montana, was chosen to represent what

Richard Matheson's novel dubbed 'Summerland.' A beautiful environment, yet as Somers noted, "There's virtually not a background there that hasn't been enhanced in one way or another." Mass Illusion's solution to the logistical difficulties was a combination of techniques. Vincent Ward explained, "The first tool they used was a combination of laser and radar, called Lidar, which could scan from about 200 yards. The Lidar crews would go in at night and map in three dimensions the area we'd been filming during the day. When you fed that information into your computer, you could move the camera anywhere around an object even though you only shot it from one position."

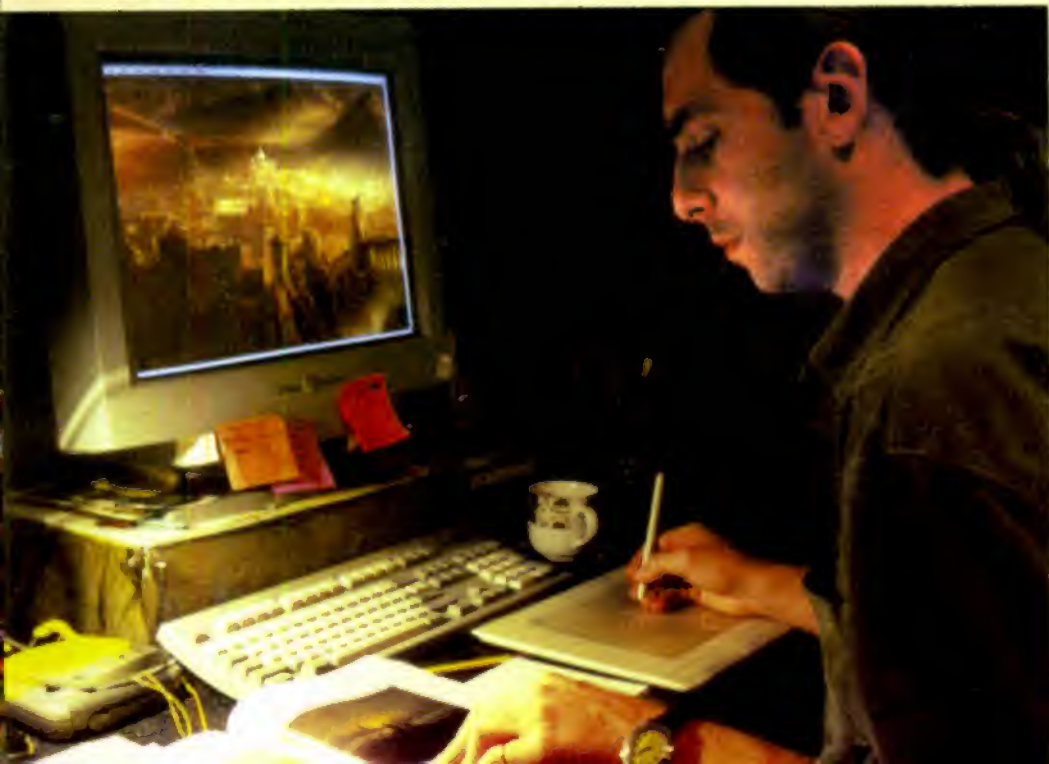
Lidar was not a new technology; it was used on *STARSHIP TROOPERS*. The most valuable tool developed by Mass Illusions software engineers Pierre Jasmin and Peter Litwinowicz was a tracking technology, Optical Flow. "This is basically an edge detection technique," Somers explained. "It allows the camera to follow pixels in the two dimensional film frame where they move in space." Take a point on an ob-

ject, track it as it moves. "Then, using the data recorded from the Lidar, reconstruct it to create 3D geometry." Somers calls Optical Flow a "spatial matting system." It allows the artist to create a mind's eye third dimension in a two dimensional film plane. The result: you can break an image down into 3D layers, as many as you want, which can be manipulated individually. "Each shot in the painted world had an average fifteen to twenty layers," Somers said, "although we had some that had over a hundred layers."

Ward explained that the next element of the puzzle was "to add the texture of oil paint: the way that light moves on oil paint, so it has moving light surfaces; the way it looks viscous; in some cases in post production making the oil paint stick to his feet as he's moving, even though he's just walking across mud on set."

This was achieved with Motion Paints, "a particle system built into the 3D layers that actually created brush strokes," said Somers. "They developed a library of brush strokes based on a lot of reference to classical artists, but they could control the attributes of each paint

Animator Deak Ferrand at work on the eye-popping computer-generated effects for *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME*—the most effective use of CGI to date.



stroke as well, creating surface, style, etcetera, compositing these as layers."

Once they started playing with these new tools, with the assistance of Mike Schmitt, 3D supervisor at Giant Killer Robots, and Karen Amsel, CG supervisor at Mobility, the digital artists found they had to sit back, ask some basic questions and relearn old techniques. For instance, the light source: Were we looking at a painting, lit by light from the viewer's point of view, or was this a painted world, lit by an internal light source in the world?

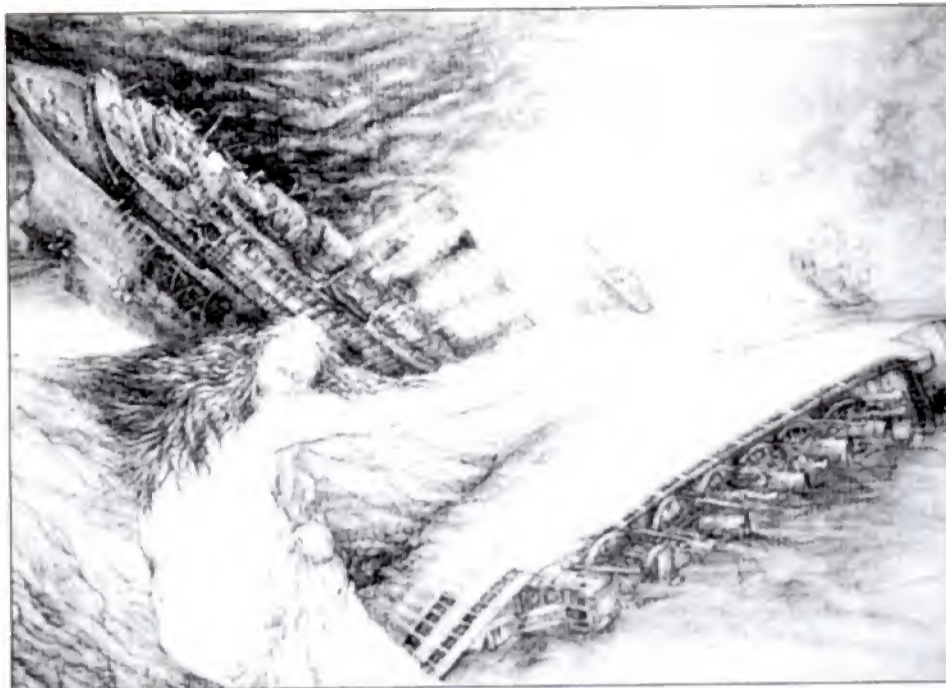
Another more influential question, not obvious at first: "A painter starts with his blank canvas; he lays down his washes of color, then starts to build on top of it. Breaking down the scene, we found we had to start with base grading first, then add layers on top of that. Just adding layers before the base didn't create the feeling of a painting. It was something we discovered as a combination of Vincent, Eugenio and Nick all trying to figure out how to make it feel more like a painted world."

The practicalities of shooting allowed Vincent Ward free-rein in Montana exactly as he'd hoped. Digital artists covered hillsides by day with orange tracking balls. Lidar crews scampered mountains by night, armed with only flashlights and "bear spray." Forty shots were realized, sometimes in what Ellen Somers refers to as "Chinese chopstick effects," a second unit camera shooting bits and pieces of clouds and skies to be thrown in later. It was as creative and un-mechanically-minded an experience as anyone could have wished.

Additionally, Digital Domain contributed the painted bird sequence, the cliff fall and poppy race, and the hauntingly surreal defoliating "autumn tree," all included in and around the Summerland section of the film.

In a philosophical vein, as the crew were looking back on the experience, Ellen Somers reflected, "We were laying all bets off on what you can do with a camera. I did not always agree that we could push the technology that far, but it wasn't necessarily like I had a choice. That's just Vincent's cinematographic style, how he feels about presenting a movie. If he doesn't do that, then it's not his film. It's a question of priority. Sometimes we don't care that it's not perfect; we care that the overall mood is what's necessary. You may want it perfect, so you just beat your head in trying to make it perfect later on." **Joe Fordham**

"If I ever give up film, that's all I'll do," said Ward of his love for painting. "I find it very similar to filmmaking in that it requires a similar sort of concentration."



A fine artist in his own right, director Vincent Ward provided this illustration of the graveyard ship seen in the self-imposed hell of guilt-ridden souls.

sympiotic relationship between this 82-year-old woman and her 42-year-old paranoid schizophrenic son. I lived with them for two years; then I wrote the screenplay for VIGIL."

The sacred and the profane, the modern western world colliding with the ancient—these were threads that would run through Ward's work to follow. "There were certainly elements of autobiography in VIGIL. I have sisters; I relate the lead character to them; but I also relate it to myself. I'd always hoped there would be girls of my own age around when I was a kid; there never were. Making this film was like inventing an imaginary sister."

Ward's debut feature was well received in Los Angeles and London. His next project would be inspired by a similarly exotic personal experience, though one not directly related to his Maori experience. Ward recalled, "I was in a motorized canoe travelling up the Amazon on the perimeter of Ecuador. The Indian navigating the canoe told me a story how many generations ago an old Indian guy had a vision of a glittering city just around the corner, long be-

fore the whites were there. Then an amazing thing happened. As the guide was telling me this story, with the sun setting behind us, we rounded the corner and the light shot onto this large corrugated iron city, which formed a sort of natural mirror. So this city that his ancestors had described had become a reality, a glittering corrugated iron shanty town. This started me thinking, 'What if ancients come into the 20th century, how would they envisage it? There would be an irony between what they saw and what we knew of it, an irony and a kind of dry humor.'"

The idea became THE NAVIGATOR, the first film to introduce Ward to fantasy and science fiction viewers; but Ward did not approach his subject matter from a necessarily fantastic point of view. "I actually tried to tell the story of a medieval visionary who sees the 20th Century, doesn't know what it is, but sees it as this visionary place, a place that for all he knows exists in the same time frame. It could be some distant, ancient city. I mean there are medieval accounts of fabled places that are written as

if they are facts—they describe elephants, and they're nothing like what we know of an elephant, but because information has been passed on, it has some measure of truth to it."

Ten years after its release, NAVIGATOR holds up. It is powerful, magical, and unique as much for its human qualities and off-beat sense of humor as for its poetic visionary qualities. Ward elaborated, "I tried to get a gritty, medieval quality, to show aspects of the middle ages that people hadn't seen. We did a lot of research from books written in that time showing how people lived in these mining communities, how many people there were, how much they were paid, what you do when a sheep falls in the mine. The humor is underplayed, but it's there."

A scene memorable for its pathos and humor occurs when the medieval travellers first encounter cars. This was another key image that inspired Ward to make the film, "I was hitch-hiking in Germany with a heavy backpack and very little money, and I crossed an autobahn. There were three lanes on one side, four on the other side. When I got to the middle, I was nearly killed. I stood there like an automaton, feeling like I had been dropped there from outer space. Out of that came that scene with Olf trying to cross that motorway."

Once he had entered the fantasy arena, Ward next found himself drawn into a very different world of film-making, writing ALIEN³, his first encounter with the studio system. Ward came away from the project with story credit and a philosophical attitude about the experience: "I felt that we were developing something that was unique. I suppose all writers feel that way. When I saw that my ideas were quite quickly being emulsified into just a repeat, obviously it was time to leave."

Ward confirmed the setting for his story was a wooden monastery in outer space. "It was a kind of Bosch-like wooden space station with some sort of technology at the husk. I've been asked to do the same story since then, in fact, by the same people that I was working with back then, because I think the

Dreams

REVIEW

Like watching a dream come true.

WHAT DREAMS MAY COME

Polygram Films presents an Interscope production, in association with Metafilms. A film by Vincent Ward. Produced by Stephen Simon, Barnet Bain. Directed by Vincent Ward. Screenplay by Ron Bass, from the novel by Richard Matheson. Cinematography: Eduardo Serra, A.F.C. Music: Michael Kamen. Editors: David Brenner, A.C.E., Maysie Hoy, A.C.E. Production Design: Eugenio Zannetti. Costume design: Yvonne Blake. Special Effects supervisors: Joel Hynek and Nick Brooks, Mass Illusions; additional effects, Digital Domain. Executive Producers: Ted Field, Scott Kroopf, Erica Huggins, Ron Bass; co-producer Alan C. Blomquist. 10/98, PG-13. 106 mins.

Chris Neilsen.....Robin Williams
Albert.....Cuba Gooding, Jr.
Annie Neilsen.....Annabella Sciorra
The Tracker.....Max Von Sydow
Leona.....Rosalind Chow

by Steve Biodrowski

Richard Matheson's *What Dreams May Come* is such a wonderful novel that one approaches the filmization with a combination of anticipation and dread: anticipation, because there is great potential for an excellent film; dread, because there is so much room for disappointment.

For the first fifteen minutes, dread begins to outweigh anticipation. Whereas Matheson got to the main point of his story (killing off protagonist Chris Neilsen and placing him in the afterlife) on the first page, the screenplay by Saul Bass begins with a scene of Chris (Williams) and his future wife (Sciorra) meeting on vacation, followed by the death of not Chris but of his children; only after several scenes of the grieving couple getting their life back together does Chris finally step over to the other side, thanks to a terrifyingly staged automobile accident.

The good news is that, once the transition is made, the film lurches almost immediately toward greatness, dazzling the viewer with a spectacular view of heaven that is not only beautiful but also profoundly moving, grounded as it is in the emotions and personality of the character experiencing it. Not only that, but those first fifteen minutes actually pay off in the long run, introducing plot elements that will be recalled later in the narrative, often to tear-inducing effect. (Apparently, this material was originally to be part of the film's flashback structure, but the studio wanted this part of the exposition to be more linear. There is



Searching for the self-imposed hell where his wife resides since committing suicide, Williams seeks guidance from Max Von Sydow and Cuba Gooding, Jr.

a chance that Vincent Ward's director's cut will restore this structure for home video release.)

The most amazing thing about the film is how it distills the essence of the novel while adding numerous touches of its own that make it work, cinematically, on its own terms. This is not merely a great adaptation of a book; it is a great film, period.

Bass's script adds layers of texture with back story elements that add dramatic weight to the plot. Abandoning the almost technical manual approach to the afterlife of Matheson (himself a true believer in the subject), Bass emphasizes the grand romanticism inherent in the story, while also tarnishing Matheson's picture-perfect portrait of family life. Not that the Neilsens are turned into a dysfunctional cliché, but they have some genuine hurdles to overcome, before and after death, that make the film more than a storybook fantasy.

Likewise, Ward's visualizing of the story is nothing short of brilliant. The book's approach to the wonders of the afterlife was straight-forward, almost matter-of-fact—which worked on the page, to be sure. For the film, however, Ward has invested every frame with a kind of magic that goes right past the frontal lobes and

lodges in the deepest part of our universal subconscious. It's as if we're seeing something new that is yet somehow strangely familiar. He may not convince you of the reality of an afterlife, but by the time the film is over, you will find yourself thinking, *If it does exist, it must be like this; otherwise, it will be a big disappointment!*

Williams is excellent in the lead. Without resorting to his trademark wackiness, he brings a glowing good humor to his Everyman role that makes the pathos ring all the more true. Sciorra adds immeasurably to her character, making visible the grief and agony that drive her to suicide (the character came across a bit pathetic, rather than sympathetic, on the page). Cuba Gooding, Jr. and Max Von Sydow are alternately endearing and funny as Neilsen's guides in the afterlife.

Technical credits are excellent across the board, including the best use ever of computer-generated imagery to create the painted world heaven in which Neilsen finds himself. But what's most amazing is the way these virtuoso visual stylings have been integrated into a stylistic whole, working together and never standing out on their own. Despite its shaky start, this film is like a dream come true. □

concept is still strong. It was a good combination of coming at something from left field, while also retaining the muscularity of Sigourney Weaver's character. The alien itself also fits very well into a religious community as they'd see it as some sort of devil-like creature."

One of the criticisms levelled at the film was the way it immediately disposed of Newt, the little girl rescued by Ripley in the previous sequel. Ward admits that Newt had no place in his plan: "No, I never liked her. I killed her off before the front credits were over," he laughed. "She was d.o.a.!"

As for his feelings on the finished film, Ward remained complimentary of director David Fincher's work, but confessed, "It was a kind of sad experience for me. Disappointing and sad. I thought there was something interesting I'll never get the chance to do." However, an intriguing taste of Ward's alien imagery that didn't make it to the screen in 1990 can be seen, eight years later, in his latest movie. Ward explained, "The upside-down cathedral in WHAT DREAMS MAY COME was something I'd had in mind for ALIEN³."

1993 marked a departure and a return for Ward: a departure from fantasy and a return to a more personal form of story-telling. "The story for MAP OF THE HUMAN HEART came from a number of different things: it came from my experiences as an outsider living in the Maori community, from living in the Arctic for a while before I started writing the story—actually while I was writing the story; it came from having a Spanish girlfriend that wouldn't return my phone calls"—he laughed—"but it mostly came from my parents, although I didn't really want to tell their story head on."

Like the half-Eskimo boy and the half-Cree Indian girl in MAP, Ward's parents were displaced aliens of mixed descent who met while serving in the field of war. Ward reiterated, "I identify strongly with people living on the perimeters, and this was a story of people who are culturally completely different, who had to try and overcome enormous personal and

cultural differences.”

MAP stands out from Ward's other films in that it is the most grounded in reality. Ward authored the story, which was scripted by Louis Nowra. It teamed him with director of photography Eduardo Serra for the first time, who would go on to photograph *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME*, and had a cast that included Jason Scott Lee, Anne Parillaud, Patrick Bergin, John Cusack, and Jeanne Moreau. This was big time movie making, shooting on ice floes in the Arctic; cast and crew were sometimes flown out to location by helicopters one hundred miles from the nearest community. Ward's canvas was growing bigger, yet there was no doubt we were in familiar territory. MAP is an enormously romantic but painful story combined with unexpected moments of humor and occasional sequences of a nightmarish intensity. The night bombing of Dresden is a spectacular example of expressionistic lighting and sleight-of-hand miniature work, a visual harbinger of hells to come in Ward's next film.

“As it's worked out, it's often been four or five years between films, so *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME* is more or less on cue.” It is easy to sense antipathies between Ward and the Hollywood movie-making machine as he reflects on his recent years working in Los Angeles. “I've found it an adaptive process. I used to always think that if something's good it will be made. This may be true in Australia, but now I think how good a project is and its chances of being made are almost in inverse proportion when you work out of California. Those films that you feel most passionate about...”—he sighed—“it's very hard to get them made.”

While writing and developing projects of his own, Ward turned to acting to gain another view of the film-making process. Ward's performances include one of the four leads in *THE SHOT*, an independent film in 1994, and two cameos for his friend Mike Figgis. “I had a brief scene in the beginning of *LEAVING LAS VEGAS*. My high point was as a sleazy businessman with Eliza-

“DREAMS embraces cutting edge technology but only at the service of a potent emotional story that exists in an intangible metaphysical zone”



Ward directs Robin Williams in a scene from *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME*.

beth Shue in the opening title sequence,” he laughed, “but we probably shouldn't mention that.” This was followed by an appearance as a pickle salesman in *ONE NIGHT STAND* in 1997. “I really enjoy acting. I feel like a lackey when I'm allowed to do it, like I'm being irresponsible, but at the same time it's very demanding.”

Equally demanding, Ward observed, is his original passion, painting, for which he now has little time. “If I ever give up filmmaking, I'll go to some remote part of New Zealand with a bunch of canvasses, and that's all I'll do. I find it very similar to film-making in that it requires a similar sort of concentration. I've sold stuff, but I've never had an exhibit.”

Still, in pre-production for *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME*, Ward supplied an Erewhon pencil and Staedtler pen rendering of the ship's graveyard in hell. “It's drawn consciously in the style of 19th century engraving, a little like William Blake. Normally, I only ever allow myself about two to three minutes on any drawing to communicate in the quickest way possible to the storyboard

artist what I want; but when I get the time, I can do something a little fancier. The most important thing for me is to communicate the emotional story as viscerally and visually as possible.”

This visceral, visual style attracted the attention of German filmmaker Werner Herzog ten years ago at the Hos Film Festival in Germany. A friendship developed between the two film-makers that brought Herzog a small role in *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME*. Ward confirmed, “Werner was living in San Francisco when he asked me if I would put him in one of my films. That's him in close-up in the sea of faces. He's in makeup to look older, because he's meant to be Robin Williams' father. I hope you got the story about him and his glasses.” (See *CFQ* 30:9-10)

Ward is reluctant to draw parallels between himself and Herzog, but if any other filmmaker can be regarded as a mentor, Herzog may be one. “Certainly, the traditions Werner draws on are some of the traditions I draw on, which are expressionist theatre, expressionist film, German romantic painting. I have an interest in

that culture because, as I said, my mother's German, so I've always kind of tracked German painting, German artists like Kathe Kollwitz. It's more an interest in the same roots, I guess. I also like Wim Wenders' work a lot, and Orson Welles, his earlier work particularly.”

Despite the struggle, despite the labels and perhaps a variance with the mainstream film-making community, Ward remained animated and optimistic about his latest work. “I suppose the most exciting thing about *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME*, which is very rare, is that, with the exception of obviously the mountain photography and a few grand sets—the aircraft carrier, the library, part of the Marie stairs—most of the world has been created in post-production. After we finished shooting, we had nine months of editing in which we were able to create these vistas that didn't exist, particularly in the painted world. We've turned what was essentially an intimate drama into something that's really an intimate epic.”

WHAT DREAMS MAY COME is without a doubt Ward's most ambitious project to date, a film that embraces cutting edge technology and pushes it to new levels, but only at the service of a potent emotional story that exists in an intangible metaphysical zone. “It's an amazingly different way of working than I've ever worked before,” Ward observed. “Only half the film is put on film while you're shooting; the other half you get in post-production. I think it must be very frightening for production designers and directors of photography, particularly if they don't have a visual background.”

Given the choice of a set with actors or another unlimited virtual palette for his next film, Ward cannot foresee a choice: “I like the intimacy of working with actors and what you receive from it as a director, but I like both ways of working. They're just totally different.”

The real question posed by *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME* will be answered by box office receipts. If that is the case, then let us hope that Vincent Ward will be allowed many more opportunities to answer us himself. □

GODS AND MONSTERS

Bill Condon recreates FRANKENSTEIN director James Whale's life and death.

While almost every film fan is familiar with the pinnacle of his output, four of the most amusing, striking, eccentric and interesting horror films ever made (FRANKENSTEIN, BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN, THE INVISIBLE MAN, and THE OLD DARK HOUSE), James Whale the man is more of an enigma, his career petering out after the '30s and his suicide occurring in the '50s just when there was a resurgence of interest in his films thanks to television and the emergence of the first magazines devoted to horror films.

Whale the artist was a mass of interesting contradictions. He showed talent at a young age, becoming a painter, a magazine cartoonist, and stage and costume designer, but such pursuits were discouraged by his impoverished family. Working in Hollywood, he oversaw every aspect of his production, directing some of the most personal projects to emerge from the studio system. He respected writers' intentions, but always personalized his pictures. His films are literate, but also visually sophisticated, and they constantly mix realism with high theatricality. In person, he was said to be soft-spoken and gentle, and yet was known as an autocratic and decisive director. His films are filled with outsiders who, much like himself, feel an attraction to and repulsion from accepted society.

Novelist Christopher Bram took the facts of Whale's life and added conjecture to create his novel, *Father of Frankenstein*. This fascinating character study in turn inspired GODS AND MONSTERS, an equally interesting look at Whale at the end of his life, haunted by and confronting his legacy and his



The subject of GODS AND MONSTERS, James Whale (right) is seen behind the scenes of BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN, with Colin Clive and Elsa Lanchester.

approaching mortality. Like Whale's own BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN, GODS AND MONSTERS is an acerbic comedy about death. The title itself is a quote from BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN. "To a new world of gods and monsters," toasts Dr. Praetorius. The title ties in specifically to the idea of creation. The film is about an artist in decline confronting the essence of what he has created. It also suggests the film's almost Pinter-like play between servant and master that goes on between the two main characters, suggesting both sides of that equation.

In Whale's most famous films, Frankenstein is a creator who knows what it feels like to be God, whose creation results in a monster that almost destroys him. In GODS AND MONSTERS, Whale (the brilliant Sir Ian McKellen) has suf-

fered a stroke that results in his spending his days either heavily medicated or assaulted by an uncontrollable flurry of ideas, memories and notions. In his hunkily handsome gardener Clayton Boone (Brendan Fraser in a squarish haircut, suggesting the monster's flattop head), Whale finds the rough clay for a new monster or friend. The film primarily explores the unusual friendship between the openly gay director and the naive, young, straight ex-marine.

For screenwriter and director Bill Condon, interest in Whale began with watching the classic horror films as a child, and then "hearing and reading *Father of Frankenstein* by Christopher Bram. I thought it was so rich thematically, and also it seemed like a book that deserved to be adapted because I thought that it could be a different [movie], but not diminished by being a

movie, because it was about a filmmaker. Chris had written the book kind of in the Whale style. I thought that we could really go with that and make a film that would be similar, and we would be able to do stuff in the movie that he wasn't able to do. It started from an initial admiration of Whale's movies and his amazing combination of poetic horror and really bizarre, eccentric wit."

Condon contacted Bram through a friend at SIKOV and found out that the book had not been optioned. With his partner, producer Gregg Fienberg, they optioned the novel; Condon wrote the script, and they spent the next two years trying to put the financing together.

"First we got Clive Barker involved as kind of our patron," recalled Condon. "Then we gave it to Ian McKellen to play Whale, and he agreed to do that. Not only did he attach himself to it, he was such a trouper. We had to trot him out for various meetings, and he willingly came and talked about it. We really had nothing definite happening, but he became such a believer in the project that he was selling it as much as we were. That was a very lucky thing. Ultimately, he became a magnet for other actors, and we finally got enough together that someone felt comfortable putting in some money."

Condon's career started in the early '80s, when he co-wrote STRANGE BEHAVIOR and STRANGE INVADERS with their director Michael Laughlin. He made his directorial debut with SISTER SISTER, followed by CANDYMAN: FAREWELL TO THE FLESH, "which is where I met Clive Barker and also Gregg Fienberg, who produced this movie. By then I realized that I

BY DENNIS FISCHER

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Above: In *GODS AND MONSTERS*, Ian McKellen stars as Whale, seen in flashback filming *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*, with Elsa Lanchester (Rosalind Ayres) as the Bride and Ernest Thesiger (Arthur Dignam) as the prissy Dr. Praetorius. Below: in a dream, Whale imagines his gardener (Brendan Fraser) as a mad scientist.

had reached a point where I felt I had learned how to [make films], and now I wanted to do something really personal and serious, so that's why I got this project going, even though for two or three years I just sat and waited to get it made."

The independently financed *GODS AND MONSTERS* proved to be an ideal project for Condon, as he was able to make the movie he wanted free from studio interference. The film was shot in four weeks on a small budget, and Condon takes the credit and/or the blame for the final result. "The script I never had to change except for budgetary reasons," he recalled. "Between that and the cast that we have and what it was about, every day I was pinching myself and reminding myself to enjoy it, because it just isn't going to get much better than this in terms of no one looking over your shoulder and working with these great people on something that you love so much."

Though *GODS AND MON-*



STERS is based on a work of fiction, Condon is dedicated to presenting the facts of Whale's life with a high degree of accuracy. "There is something about movies that makes people believe them," he observed, "so it was a slightly more complicated issue than it would have been for Chris [Bram]. In the long tradition [of mixing fact and fiction], the most obvious recent thing being *RAGTIME*, I think it is easy to understand what character is [Doctorow's] and not the real one. I talked to a lot of people who knew [Whale], especially Curtis Harrington, the director who helped us a lot, and Ian did too.

"Curtis Harrington is a friend of mine, so he's been very helpful, but he also made it very clear that he didn't approve of the whole conceit—starting from the novel—and his point was why not just make it a fictional character? I think he was afraid, especially since it deals so much with [Whale's] sexuality, that it would in some



Whale dreams a gray vista representing both his Gothic horror films and the World War I horrors that inspired them.

way dishonor him, and it was kind of the most anxious screening I had when I went over to [Harrington's] house and showed him the tape. He had never read the novel—he wouldn't do it—and he never read the script, and he was very moved by the film and said it was a real tribute to [Whale], and it really captured him too, and both of those things meant a lot to me.

"But just as we started, we realized we had to accept this is a different creation than the real person. For the most part, we're pretty close to the main facts of Whale's life—I talked to a lot of people who knew him and obviously did a lot of research of my own. But the other main character, Clay, was just concocted by Chris Bram—that's a completely fictional character."

The third major character in the drama is Hannah (Lynn Redgrave), Whale's housekeeper and cook. Condon explained, "Whale had a housekeeper and a cook, one was called Anna and the other was called Joanna, and sometimes when people came over for the second time, he would quiz them on which was which. I sort of combined them into this character which Chris had had in the book."

Condon was concerned because the German or Hungarian housekeeper with the thick ac-

cent is something of a stock character, so he needed someone who could provide a convincing accent while avoiding cliché. At the same time, the character provides some comic relief in the film, so the actress would have to handle comedy in a James Whale-Una O'Connor style and, most importantly, would need to come off as a real person, not a caricature.

"I needed someone who could still keep it real enough so that when the emotional things come through, they had some impact," recalled Condon. "I could only think of two or three people, and Lynn Redgrave was the first one we offered it to, and she said yes. Lynn took her cue a bit from those great character performances that Whale would get—for example, Una O'Connor from *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*—and just added those moments of absurdity and slightly ripe moments. Again, she's amazing because she knows exactly how to do it without making it too much."

Hannah plays an important role because she serves as a reminder of the prevailing attitude toward homosexuality at the time. "What I like about her is it's someone who is all secret," said Condon. "She has her own secret take on all of this, and she is probably some-

what amused by it and has this sort of deep love for him that goes unexpressed. I think that's kind of a variation on the Whale universe—you only get to see the disdain and disapproval because she does represent the accepted wisdom of the time. We show that and show underneath it; we learn it's her own façade for her truer feelings.

"I think you're kind of wondering why she is hanging on for so long. [Whale] even asks her at the end, and she says, 'It's my job,' but Lynn is able to imbue it with a sense that it's really her second marriage. It can happen in people's lives an awful lot where [the] peculiar relationships that you wind up with then become full in their own way. Even if there's playacting in them. Even if he's playacting the master of the manor and she's playacting the servant, who is running whom is questionable to a degree."

Once Clay finds out that Whale is homosexual, there is an almost obligatory scene wherein Clay feels compelled to put his cards on the table and make sure Whale realizes that Clay is heterosexual and asks him the question, "You don't look at me that way, the way I look at girls?"

"That is an archetypal scene between straight and gay, that

will never change," commented Condon. "Once sexuality is in there, Clay is making sure, and Whale is both reassuring him that he can make that distinction and also [making] you wonder if he really can. You find out later that it was never really sex that [Whale] wanted out of him at all, once he gets this idea about this final act of creation."

With McKellen in place as Whale, Condon needed to find his Clay. "There were certain physical qualifications," he said. "It had to be someone who was threatening, but also had poetry in his soul, and there aren't too many of those. He had to be huge, so in a weird way, if you thought about it long enough, it became pretty clear who those people should be. Luckily, when we offered [these roles] to these people, they said yes. They sort of felt that it was right for them too."

Condon praised Fraser's passion for research and indicated that the actor went back to Mary Shelley's novel and the Prometheus myth. "He had the hardest part, I think," observed Condon, "because Whale was a performer and Lynn had all that comic, juicy stuff, but, by definition, that character was all inside of himself and not articulate and didn't know how to express himself, and that's a tough thing to pull off. I think more than anything, if I encouraged [Fraser] in any way, it was to use his natural comic gifts. I thought he brought comic stuff to this where it didn't exist, and once I saw that happening, I just kind of encouraged him. Often when I watch the movie, I'm just looking at him. People [talk] about acting being so much about listening, and what he did here was a really good example of that."

Additionally, there are brief glimpses of other real life people, including Colin Clive, Elsa Lanchester, Boris Karloff, and Ernest Thesiger. "Thank God for Rosalind Ayres who just came in at the end, and I thought she was just so close," commented Condon about the actress who portrays Lanchester. "She got her essence, I thought, and that was the toughest. Karloff was an actor, Jack Betts, who actually looks a lot

GODS AND MONSTERS

THE SCREENPLAY

Adapting the novel by Christopher Bram.



Condon was intrigued by the novel's cinematic potential, including Whale's flashbacks to memories and nightmares, such as receiving a brain transplant.

The novel *Father of Frankenstein* had its origins in a proposed documentary about Whale that was never produced. Asked for some ideas for a fictional framework, novelist Christopher Bram "couldn't stop thinking about James Whale. And when I finished the novel I was working on and was looking around for new projects, I realized I had to write the James Whale novel."

One of the few published resources he found was James Curtis' 1982 biography, *James Whale*, which impressed Chris while raising tantalizing questions: "If the Curtis book had been more complete, and had given the reader the whole James Whale, I wouldn't have written the novel. But there were gaps, and for a novelist those gaps are a gold mine, a place for the imagination to rush in."

Writer-director Bill Condon read *Father of Frankenstein* shortly after it appeared in bookstores and immediately saw the screen possibilities. "Of the books I've adapted, this was by far the easiest," he said. "To begin with, the dramatic structure is great, and so is Chris's gift for dialogue. He's absolutely precise in capturing period, catching the small words that have gone out of fashion, and that part of it was a total pleasure."

Chris didn't expect much fidelity to his book. He had the experience of being hired to write a screenplay (never produced) of David Leavitt's novel *The Lost Language of Cranes*, and found that he had to write almost completely new dialogue. Dialogue that works on the page doesn't always play on the screen. In the case of *GODS AND MONSTERS*, however, Condon found almost too much of a good thing. "It was a matter of picking the best lines, getting the essence of the lines," he recalled.

Several changes were made,

however. Condon deliberately softened the character of Clay Boone, the angry drifter who enters Whale's life in its last few weeks. "For example, in the novel, Clay never admits to Whale a secret from his past," said Condon. "The character in the book is practically incapable of making a connection. Obviously, Clay was the most difficult character to adapt, and, I always say, that Brendan had the hardest part as an actor. Obviously, Whale is an actor himself, and he's an entertainer, and Hannah is a wonderful, goofy creation, but Clay is by definition, the kind of guy who keeps it all inside, doesn't know how to express himself, is inarticulate, is sitting on a lot of stuff that can explode in the end. I loved watching everything he did to bring that to life."

The book's original epilogue—Whale's funeral—also presented problems. "I thought the ending had real power in the book, I just didn't think it would be that satisfying on film," said Condon.

Fortunately, Bram had a ready solution. "I told him a little bit about the epilogue which I had sketched out but decided not to use, where years later Clay Boone

is grown up and he's watching *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* on the late show with his kids. Bill said, 'That's exactly what I need.' So he then wrote his own version."

"Because movies change as we change, a movie will mean something different to us in ten years," said Condon of the new ending. "The idea that Clay recognizes himself in the movie is, to me, very moving."

The device also brought full circle Condon's first concept for the screenplay: the scene in which all the characters are shown watching *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*, each having his own unique and multi-layered responses. Also, Condon wanted to restore to the blind hermit scene some of its original poignancy and poetry—something lost on a generation raised on the inspired, if ruthless send-up in Mel Brooks' *YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN*. Condon was worried that preview audience might laugh at the appearance of the hermit, and was much relieved when they didn't. Since the bride scene itself appears in the film as a metaphor for the relationship between Whale and Boone, a

comic response from the audience would have been deadly.

The trade-off for writing and directing a low-budget film was not having to deal with extraneous, "dumb" ideas and input from studio development types. "The journey from the first draft to the shooting script was not a long one at all," said Condon, "and it only involved making some budgetary cuts, and incorporating some great ideas from the actors."

The budget did dictate some cuts, however. "There were a few frustrating things I did lose from the first draft. There was, for example, the scene of Whale having a triumphant return to London for the *INVISIBLE MAN*, and meeting H.G. Wells. And another wonderful scene, from the book, of him attending the premiere of George Cukor's *CAMILLE* at the Chinese Theatre, having him walk up that red carpet only to be introduced as 'the king of horror,' and bristle at that. There were so many wonderful things that set up. It showed a moment when he and David Lewis had a nice relationship; it showed how comfortable they were as homosexuals in Hollywood in that period, and how comfortable Hollywood was with it, too, to a degree. It also set up the Cukor rivalry, and there was a wonderful moment where he runs into Greta Garbo. That, I admit, I was really sad to lose."

Whatever was lost, Bram was more than relieved that his original work was spared the usual Frankensteinish chop-and-stitch work that is too often the fate of literary properties in Tinsel Town. "I love Bill Condon. I love the script he wrote, but when I tell people this, they express surprise. They say, 'You're the novelist, and you like the way your work's been treated?' They can't believe it; they've never heard it before. But it's true."

David J. Skal

At a garden party, an embarrassed Whale is forced into a reunion with his "monsters": Boris Karloff (Jack Betts) and Elsa Lanchester (Rosalind Ayres).



GODS AND MONSTERS

CLIVE BARKER

The executive producer takes a new career direction.

By Michael Beeler

GODS AND MONSTERS is the first film in three years to bear the name of horror maestro Clive Barker, who served as its executive producer, but the film is very different from the gory S&M fare that Barker's fans have come to expect. In fact, it may be the beginning of a new breed of Barker films that are mature, articulate, and edgy.

"GODS AND MONSTERS shows the image of a man who is at the end of his life, stricken with a terrible disease and looking back on his life with a certain degree of bitterness," explained Barker. "It's a wonderful story. It takes pains to show the best and the worst. I think it is what art should be looking for. We didn't set out to make a political tract that was going to be presenting some particular point of view about gay men or being creative or any of that stuff. We set out to tell Bram's story about James Whale.

"There is a scene in this movie where [Whale] sees the Elsa Lanchester character through the make-up room, dressed as the bride of Frankenstein, on to the sound stage for the moment of her unveiling. Besides being a beautiful shot and very wittily scripted, it's also a moment where you see an artist doing something extraordinary as he's creating an image, which is going to linger for as long as there are cinemas in which to show these movies."

The film took its first step toward creation when writer-director Bill Condon optioned the rights to Christopher Bram's novel *Father of Frankenstein*. To help bring the project to life, Condon went to Barker, whom he had known for years. "(Condon) had directed CANDY-



Exec producer Clive Barker (with brain) clowns around with writer-director Bill Condon in front of the dummy body of Whale used in the nightmare brain transplant scene.

MAN 2," said Barker. "I had been the one, I think, that proposed him to Propaganda [Films] for that project. I thought and think the world of him. We have always had great conversations about our passion for movies. I suspect, though I don't remember, that we probably even spoke about James Whale from time to time. It seems rather unimaginable to me that we didn't talk about him, given how we love old movies, and [there's] the gay connection obviously. So he called me and said, 'Have you read this book?' By coincidence, I have a quote on the book; I think perhaps that was for the paperback edition. So Bill and I came together out of a mutual enthusiasm for Christopher Bram's book and for the subject of James Whale."

Condon added, "Ever since CANDYMAN 2, Clive and I had always talked about doing something else. Then I just mentioned to him, 'You wouldn't be interested in doing something that's not based on one of your books, would you?' And, he said, 'Sure!' He was especially excited when I mentioned

Whale. I mean there are such obvious connections between Clive's life and James Whale's. So he generously agreed to become our patron, our godfather—our Coppola, if you will—and attach his name to it and help us get it going.

"He brought a number of things to this production," Condon continued. "First of all, it's as simple as when we met Ian McKellen for the first time, instead of him coming to my little bungalow in Silverlake, we got to go to Clive's wonderful house in Beverly Hills. I felt like it gave us a certain amount of presence. So, we seemed like we were real and not just Gregg Fienberg, who is the producer, and me. Not that we were two guys up the creek, but being there with Clive—it just sort of made us look like we were more. But that was the smallest thing. It's amazing how delicate these negotiations are and how many times a movie at this level can fall apart, and Clive was just always there with the right phone call—you know, to kind of keep things going at various points."

Barker further elaborated on those initial meetings: "Bill and

I were working hard on Ian, to persuade him to do it because it was a small picture and he wasn't going to be paid this huge amount of money. Here we were trying to get one of the greatest actors in the world to make a very modestly scaled picture with us. So it was the persuasion stuff, or rather the creation of the persuasion stuff, that I did a bit of as the producer. And obviously I was also looking at the accounts with Bill and talking to him and hopefully being a useful sounding board for ideas. But again, you know my more negative experiences as a director on LORD OF ILLUSIONS, so I was

also trying not to get between Bill and what he really wanted to do. It was a matter of trying to just be a good listener and a good collaborator when he wanted that."

Despite Barker and Condon's previous horror collaboration, their new film is quite different. "GODS AND MONSTERS isn't a special effects movie," said Barker. "It isn't even a horror movie in the strict sense, though it partakes of the genre. It's a character piece. So, when we went to Ian, it was with an extraordinary role—one which, I think, it would be hard for any actor to resist. You get to play a character in many stages of his life. You get to play the highs and the lows. You get to play the agony and the ecstasy, as it were."

Barker continued, "Brendon's role is equally exciting, I think, for an actor, because you watch the spiritual growth of someone through the picture. I think the emotional payoff of the picture—the last two minutes—carry an extraordinary emotional weight. And the sense of the three of them, be-

continued on page 62

like Clark Gable, but we were able to put appliances onto certain parts to conjure him. Lancaster is so familiar and stayed so familiar to anyone who is of a certain age. That was a tough one, so I was grateful Rosalind showed up that day."

Even bit parts are expertly cast and performed. For example, there is the mini-portrait of actor Colin Clive in *THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*. When Whale sees how stiff Clive is, he taunts him with the hint that Ernest Thesiger's Dr. Praetorius is "a little bit in love" with Baron Frankenstein, and as the camera pulls back, the actor's eyes start to get that kind of electric look that Clive brought to his fevered characterization. Condon's film subtly suggests how Clive's performance came out of a manipulation by Whale of Clive's own fears (though Condon does not make this point as clearly as he might have).

Overall, the casting of the film is inspired. "We just got lucky on this one," said Condon. "So much of it is those three main characters. The actors we had [really came through for us]. There was one time when Ian had to do two huge speeches in about two hours, and he just did it. The same with Brendan and Lynn. We couldn't have done it if any one of those actors had been less than completely prepared."

With his cast intact, Condon needed to re-create the worlds of Whale, past and present, including the laboratory set from *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*. He turned to Richard Sherman, a production designer with whom he had previously worked. "I thought that if Whale were living today, he would reside in houses and rooms similar to the ones that Richard designs," said Condon, "so he just seemed like a perfect fit for this."

Other important collaborators include Sota Effects, who handled the make-up chores, re-creating the classic Frankenstein Monster and his Bride for the film; costumer Bruce Finlayson, who carefully re-created the character's outfits; and composer Carter Burwell (late of the Coen movies), who wove in a theme from Franz Wax-

"You find out later that it was never really sex that [Whale] wanted out of [Clay Boone], once he gets this idea about this final act of creation."



Faced with slow mental deterioration, Whale pretends to paint his gardener, while actually hoping to provoke the innocent young man into killing him.

man's acclaimed score for *BRIDE* into his subtle score.

To create makeup to make Betts look like Karloff, Sota Effects got some lifemasks of Karloff to make the design look as lifelike as possible. Condon also had the company contribute to a sequence wherein Whale dreams that his skull is being sliced open, his brain taken out, and a new one put in. "We really wanted to do an effect that was like one they would do then," said Condon, "no more sophisticated, so it was in the style of the 1930s. So that was very fun to deal with."

The Frankenstein Monster proved a bit difficult. Playing Karloff's monster is an actor named Amir Aboulela, who appeared in the script more than he wound up in the actual film itself, especially as material was cut for time. Condon also had some conflict over the accuracy of the makeup, but declined to comment on it.

A major consideration of any film is its look, which in this case had to capture both Whale's monochromatic Expressionism and the '50s world of his final days. Cameraman and frequent Condon-collaborator Steven Katz provides the production with a glossy sheen

that belies its limited resources. Condon and Katz chose to work in the widescreen format, to evoke the '50s era where most of the story is set. "1950s for me is so much about widescreen and Technicolor and a certain flat look," explained Condon, "and I felt it was important that that shape, which really became so predominant—Jackson Pollock, or cars or widescreen movies—that this movie have that, and that we could play off of that kind of '50s Technicolor world with the '30s Expressionistic world that Whale belonged in, so that he really seemed like an anachronism in the world that he found himself stuck in. A kind of more practical thing is that there is a lot of talk in the movie, and a lot of it is just a three-hander between these main characters. I think widescreen just makes it more interesting visually, so that it doesn't become a square, staring-at-faces approach."

Additionally, Condon hoped to capture something of Whale's style in the film. "We wanted to play off the flatness of the '50s, with his Expressionistic style in the flesh," he said. "It's not black and white, so much, though there is a dream sequence where he imag-

ines getting a new brain and we did that on a replica of the laboratory set. We re-created shots and angles there, but my notion was that Whale is in a state where he's lost control (because of a few minor strokes) of where his mind takes him, and he sort of gets disoriented. A lot about things from the present trigger memories of the past.

"As the movie progresses towards the finale, after he goes to the George Cukor party, he is so disoriented that when he comes back, people from his past are actually standing in the room with him. We also change the style of the movie, so even though we are still in the '50s kind of Technicolor world, it is being done in this Expressionistic way with hard shadows, skewed angles, and really a more black-and-white feel to it, and so you, the audience, feel subliminally like Whale—you don't even know what's past and what's present anymore."

Another stylistic device is almost constant rain through the last fifteen minutes of the film. The electrical storm makes a gothic connection to Whale's movies, so that the film becomes increasingly like one of his '30s horror productions. Then the effect is reprised a second time at the very end with a cleansing image of Clay looking up, with the rain pouring down on him, as if Whale's spirit is washing over him.

"One thing I worried about is that in the last chunk of the movie, it rains," confided Condon. "Living here, I thought people were going to say it just never rains that hard. However, in the four months that I've screened the movie, getting it ready, and since Sundance, I've never screened it when it wasn't pouring outside. It just happened to be because of El Niño, so that was one argument that went away."

Another concern was the fact that Universal's monster make-ups are copyrighted, and to depict them in the film, permission needed to be obtained. "We got lucky there," said Condon. "A friend of mine, whom I won't even name, works at Universal and was able to help us get the rights to the clips, because they are so protective of that, especially the makeup and

everything. So with that and working with Karloff's estate a little, we were able to get the rights to use the stuff and kind of came in under the radar, I think. That was a huge relief, because so much of the movie depends on being able to use those clips because the whole film is a variation on certain scenes from BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN, especially the eight-minute sequence where all of Bram's characters are watching that movie on television. It would have been a shame not to be able to use that.

"One of the things I like is having all these people watch BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN and showing how a movie is only what you bring to it, and what you can see in it. Then I also love that the Brendan Fraser character then sees the same movie again many years later, to plant that movies also change when you change, that they have different meanings for you at different points in your life. I love that he was able to sense something that he connected to when he first saw it, and that when he looks at it again, he smiles in recognition and realizes that he was right in there. That I love. Life changes us, and I guess, in a demented way, I always track the changes in my life through my reactions to movies and which ones mean something to me and which ones have lost their meaning."

One of the things that enriches the film is that Condon has threaded references to Whale's horror work throughout. Like Frankenstein Whale needs a new brain—because his own has become dysfunctional (in one nightmare sequence, he imagines Clayton performing brain surgery on him). With his debilitating condition rapidly diminishing his remaining artistic talents, mostly expressed in a series of sketches of Clay, he begins to "hate living, love dead," like the Monster who finds in life a series of rejections and misunderstandings. Such touches greatly enrich the film by drawing interesting connections between Whale's work and his life.

According to production designer Richard Sherman, "Bill runs an amazingly friendly set.

"The moment of the Bride's unveiling, you see an artist doing something extraordinary," said Clive Barker, "creating an image which is going linger."



In one of many flashbacks, Whale recalls himself in his Hollywood glory days, at the height of his creative powers, filming BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN.

I think that he really gives the people he has chosen to work with him a tremendous opportunity to express what they want to do, and he doesn't thwart their ideas. Oftentimes, he'll have ideas, and every director is allowed to do that; even without a lot of explanation, if you just give him an idea, he'll say, 'That's great, I get it.' He's a very smart person and gets inherent things very quickly and is very expressive.

"He pretty much lets people like the costume department, the production design department, not necessarily do what they want to do, but express what they feel is appropriate for the movie, and this has been my experience with him on every movie I've ever done with him. Bill makes the movie-making process very comfortable.

"As far as I'm concerned it was a wonderful production," he added. "Time wasn't that much of a factor because the movie, fortunately, wasn't location heavy. Sometimes on these smaller budget movies, they have 55-60 different places they want to go to, which makes it very difficult. This movie has a few major locations and a couple of little stops here and there, like the bar where [Clay] meets

the girl friend. We weren't all over the city."

Still, the budget became an issue because the producers didn't really comprehend what it was going to cost to reproduce Whale's sets. Said Sherman, "It took some fighting; they didn't meet me all the way, and there were some cuts, too. We were going to do the prison from the FRANKENSTEIN movie; we were going to do the graveyard; and there was something else that went because we didn't have the money. I tried to explain to them that it's better to have two or three really great things that are really wonderful, really accurate, and really beautiful, than to have four or five things that are half done. Bill was wonderful and rewrote and reorchestrated his script to get us out of those places so we didn't have to build them, and then we were able to concentrate on the couple of big set pieces that we could afford and just went with that."

At a time when critics are complaining that few films contain any interesting characters and relationships, GODS AND MONSTERS contains very detailed characters with an interesting relationship. The pair are involved in a classic power

struggle: each has something that the other wants. For Clay, the young gardener, Whale has great stories to tell; he's done wonderful things. Clay, like a lot of people, has come from the midwest to Los Angeles in search of something—he doesn't even know what it is—and he sees in Whale someone who took that same journey from England and has achieved success, work, art, and money—all the things Clay would like. On the other hand for Whale, Clay has a future; he's young and beautiful, and has a certain freedom that Whale wishes he had. Initially, he simply delights in observing Clay's finely formed physique, inviting the gardener to swim in his pool and not to worry about wearing a bathing suit.

Whale sees some potential in Clay to wake up his creative powers one last time. "This is the last act of creation that he wants to do with Clay," said Condon, "and toward the end of the movie, [the audience understands] it's not sex that he wants out of him." Whale has an idea triggered in his dream state by images from his movie. "He actually wakes up to the idea the first time, if you watch the movie closely, when he's looking at Karloff, and he gets the idea from a famous line the monster says in that movie.

"I think it's always fascinating in the movies to put together characters who are the most unlikely people into a room, just to share a room together and communicate, and watch how those two people find something more in common than all those things that separate them," said Condon. "Ultimately, they are both gods and monsters!

"Whale by virtue of age, sexuality, is the outsider, the monster to a lot of people, and probably to Clay at the beginning, and Clay is obviously the same thing, physically, almost. For them to see that in each other is very moving, and very familiar actually, and very true. People who are so different are the ones that you often find something of yourself in."

Following completion of the film, Condon turned to composer Carter Burwell for scoring. "There is something so original

GODS AND MONSTERS

JAMES WHALE

A look back at the director's Hollywood horror.

By Patricia Moir

Although most moviegoers today are unfamiliar with the name of James Whale, there are few who are unaware of his most famous cinematic achievements: the horror classics *FRANKENSTEIN*, *THE INVISIBLE MAN*, and *THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*. From an inauspicious beginning as the son of working-class English parents, Whale went on to become first a well-known theatrical director in Britain and then, in the mid-thirties, to critical and box-office success working for Universal studios. Still, despite the powerful influence his films have had on other directors past and present, Whale himself has received relatively little attention. The upcoming feature film, *GODS AND MONSTERS*, based on the novel *Father of Frankenstein* by Christopher Bram, attempts to shed some light on the character of the self-effacing, gentlemanly figure who was responsible for some of the most memorably horrifying imagery Hollywood ever produced.

As a young man at the turn of the century, Whale's interest in the arts set him apart from the majority of his classmates. Scorning sports and the other pursuits common to his fellows, Whale set his sights on escaping his origins and worked hard to eliminate all traces of his lower-class accent and manners. The effort paid off, and, though he continued to struggle financially, he achieved the status of a commissioned officer in World War I. It was during a 15-month internment in a German POW camp that Whale had his first taste of the theatre, acting in amateur dramatic productions staged by the imprisoned officers. After the war, he entered London's theatrical world, gradually working his way up from stage manager, set designer, and occasional actor to director of a number of modest productions, in the company of other young hopefuls like Raymond Massey, Alan Napier, Elsa Lanchester, and Ernest Thesiger. During this time, he became engaged to painter and designer Doris Zinkeisen, a relationship that endured for several years despite Whale's growing preference for the company of a series of gentleman lovers. The couple's eventual breakup was amicable, and the two remained close friends and col-



Though he came to despise the genre, James Whale directed four of Universal Pictures' horror classics, including *FRANKENSTEIN*.

leagues. Whale, while discreet, never made a secret of his sexual preference, though he remained exceedingly sensitive to any mention of his working-class background. Lanchester's husband, Charles Laughton, himself a closet homosexual, contemptuously referred to him as a "would-be gentleman"; while Whale was accepted as a fellow actor, he still remained something of an outsider amid the upper middle-class theatrical milieu.

It was shortly before his fortieth birthday that Whale got his big break directing R.C. Sheriff's *Journey's End*, a play about life in the trenches during WWI, which starred the then-unknown Laurence Olivier. Despite its depressing subject matter, the production was well-received and moved to a West End theatre, where Olivier was replaced by Colin Clive, who would later become Whale's favorite actor and one of his closest friends. The play subsequently moved overseas to Broadway, where Whale caught the attention of Paramount Pictures, who offered him a contract at \$500 per week, a sum which must have seemed a fortune to the perpetually broke director.

Whale moved to Hollywood, where he made the forgettable *HELL'S ANGELS* (featuring the young Jean Harlow) for

Howard Hughes, which was followed in 1929 by the film version of *JOURNEY'S END*. It was also in 1929 that Whale met and moved in with David Lewis, with whom he was to share the most significant and longest-lasting relationship of his life.

In 1931, Whale met producer Carl Laemmle Jr., who asked him to direct *WATERLOO BRIDGE*, with Bette Davis, for Universal. Impressed with the results, Laemmle subsequently offered Whale his pick of Universal's current properties. Whale, intrigued at the opportunity to "dabble in the macabre," chose *FRANKENSTEIN*.

DRACULA, the first of Universal's great horror films of the 1930s, had opened on Valentine's Day, 1931, making Bela Lugosi an overnight sensation, and the studio had planned to capitalize on the film's success with a *FRANKENSTEIN* scripted and directed by French filmmaker Robert Florey, starring Lugosi as the monster. However, contractual conflicts, along with Laemmle's dissatisfaction with Lugosi's makeup tests, led to

Universal's shifting both Florey and Lugosi to another project, leaving *FRANKENSTEIN* free for Whale.

Whale took the preparations for the picture very seriously, and carefully studied German films like *THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI*, *THE GOLEM*, and *METROPOLIS* in order to better reproduce their expressionist style. He improved the screenplay's characterizations and took control of casting, retaining only two of Universal's original choices, Edward Van Sloan and Dwight Frye (both well-known after *DRACULA*), to play Dr. Waldman and Fritz the hunchback, respectively. Whale wanted Bette Davis for the part of the mad doctor's fiancée, but Laemmle felt she hadn't enough sex appeal, so Whale cast Mae Clarke, who had also appeared in *WATERLOO BRIDGE*, in the role. He overruled Laemmle's preference for Leslie Howard as Henry Frankenstein, insisting on Colin Clive, whose edgy, manic quality in *Journey's End* seemed right for the role of the driven scientist. And in what turned out to be an inspired choice, Whale, at the suggestion of David Lewis, cast British actor Boris Karloff as Frankenstein's creature.

In a letter to Clive, Whale envisioned Frankenstein as an "intensely sane person,

at times rather fanatical and in one or two scenes a little hysterical.[His] nerves are all to pieces. He is a very strong, extremely dominant personality, sometimes quite strange and queer, sometimes very soft, sympathetic, and decidedly romantic." Whether as a result of his homosexuality or his class-consciousness, Whale also identified with the creature's role as an unwanted outsider, remarking to Clive that the role contained "a great deal" of their own characters (Clive, an unhappily married bisexual alcoholic, had had his own difficulties adjusting to "normal" society). Karloff's sensitive portrayal of the creature's anguished yearning for companionship, all the more remarkable for its being projected from beneath Jack Pierce's heavy makeup, added great depth to Whale's conception, though the two frequently argued over scenes, with the director demanding brutal depictions of the creature's actions, and Karloff pleading for a more

subdued, sympathetic rendering of his character. Whale developed an inexplicable personal dislike for Karloff, who was, by all accounts, an amiable coworker; possibly the actor's gentlemanly British upbringing reminded Whale of his own humble origins. Despite this antagonism, however, Whale was happy with the results of their collaboration, and lavished great attention on the film's dramatic scenes. The creation sequence, a masterpiece of 85 separate cuts, remains one of the most riveting on film to this day.

Prior to the film's release, Universal censors cut several scenes, including one in which the creature is tortured by Fritz, and another in which he drowns little Maria (ironically, the latter cut, which omitted an important element in the development of the creature's character, served to make the scene even more horrific—if Maria isn't seen to be the victim of an accidental drowning, the audience is left to imagine what the creature has done to her). The studio also excised Frankenstein's triumphant, heretical cry at the moment of creation: "Now I know what it feels like to be a god!" In spite of these omissions, the film opened to instant acclaim in December, 1931, making Karloff a star and Whale a huge sensation. *FRANKENSTEIN'S* moody, expressionistic lighting and groundbreaking special effects left a deep impression on audiences. According to a story that Whale often related at dinner parties, he was awakened late on the night of the premiere by a man who was unable to sleep after seeing the film; "If I can't



Behind the scenes of Whale's masterpiece, *THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*—elaborately shot, lavishly appointed, considered by some to be horror's best.

sleep," the caller said, "I'll be damned if you will!"

Universal immediately began pressuring Whale to direct a sequel to *FRANKENSTEIN*, but the director was determined to try something new. He wrote a treatment for a film based on H.G. Wells' *The Invisible Man*, which was rejected by the studio, and finally settled on directing an adaptation of J.B. Priestly's *Benighted*, later titled *THE OLD DARK HOUSE*. A combination of horror film and sophisticated drawing room comedy, *THE OLD DARK HOUSE* (1932) is probably Whale's least appreciated film, largely because of its limited availability (it was rescued from the Universal vaults and restored for limited release in the late '60s by Whale's friend Curtis Harrington). The story concerns Philip and Margaret Waverton (Raymond Massey and Gloria Stuart, of recent *TITANIC* fame) and their friend Penderel (Melvyn Douglas), who seek refuge from a storm at the Welsh country house of the Femm family (including Ernest Thesiger), all of whom are quite mad. There is little subtlety to the plot, and the characters are undeniably camp, but as black comedy, *THE OLD DARK HOUSE*, as its title suggests, is a hilarious send-up of its genre, replete with lightning flashes, dark shadows, a sinister butler (Boris Karloff), and a lunatic sibling kept hidden behind locked doors.

Modern critics have endeavored to find homoerotic overtones in the plot of *THE OLD DARK HOUSE*, based on the rather flimsy evidence of leering glances and acts of brotherly devotion on the part of the Femms. But there is an undeniably gay

campiness in the presence of Ernest Thesiger, who, at Whale's insistence, was imported from England for the part of Horace Femm. Thesiger was a well-known homosexual, one of the most colorful of Whale's London theatrical set, and it is his exaggerated posturing which provides many of the film's best comedic moments.

Whale had, in the meantime, asked R.C. Sheriff to rewrite the script for *THE INVISIBLE MAN*. Sheriff chose to ignore the many versions making the rounds at Universal and returned to Wells' novel for inspiration, while Whale took advantage of the time spent on rewrites to direct *THE KISS BEFORE THE MIRROR*, the first of his many collaborations with editor Ted Kent. Immediately afterward, Whale, eager to avoid Universal's continuing pressure for a *FRANKENSTEIN* sequel, began working on *THE INVISIBLE MAN*.

Viewed today, *THE INVISIBLE MAN* seems somewhat tedious, lacking in the dramatic tension evident in Whale's earlier films. The pacing is awkward, with long scenes showcasing the film's special effects, which cannot long sustain the interest of a '90s audience. For their time, however, they were revolutionary, and the viewers of 1933 were no doubt enthralled by the many scenes in which chairs and bicycles are thrown about by an unseen presence, and the dramatic moments in which the titular character's bandages are unwound to reveal his invisibility. Special effects artist John P. Fulton achieved most of the shots with the use of wires and simple mechanical devices, but for the "unmasking" scenes, leading man Claude Rains was clothed in black velvet under his costume and shot against a black backdrop, and the resulting footage was then superimposed on the live action using double-exposure techniques.

Whale cast Rains on the strength of his theatrically trained voice, which he deemed essential in a character whose face would not be glimpsed until the film's final moments. Rains does his best with the role, ranting and laughing maniacally, but the character is flawed in the writing, and his essential sadism is undercut in a series of scenes featuring acts of petty and ineffectual buffoonery. The result is an uneasy mixture of light comedy and real viciousness; there are no really sympathetic characters save that of the hapless fiancée (Gloria Stuart), and, despite its success, *THE INVISIBLE MAN* seems, in retrospect, one of Whale's least impressive films.

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GODS AND MONSTERS

PRODUCTION DESIGN

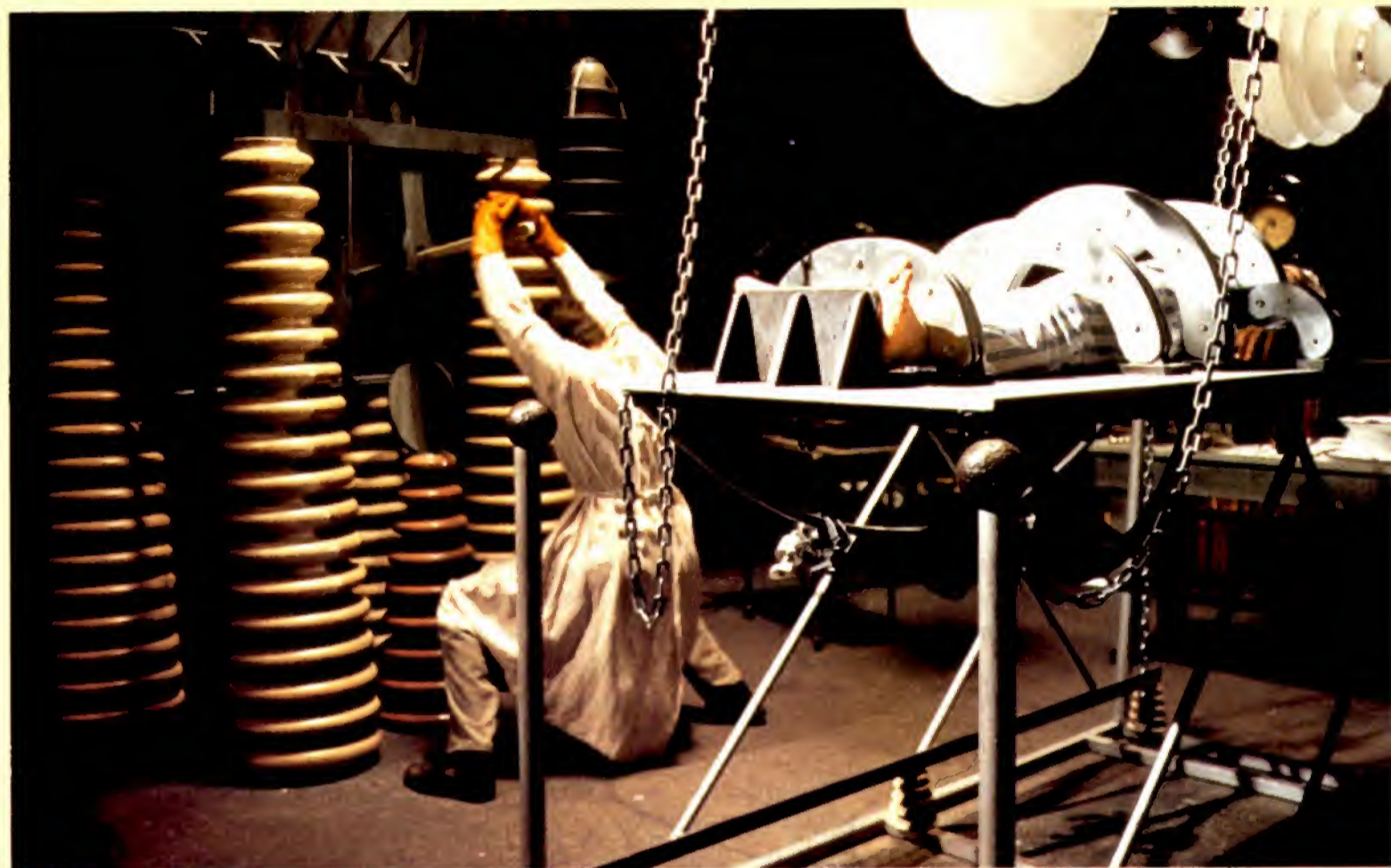
Rebuilding Frankenstein's laboratory.

Asked to recreate the famous laboratory from *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*, production designer Richard Sherman (Bill Condon's *SISTER SISTER*) contacted Universal for any archival materials on the *FRANKENSTEIN* films, but discovered that the studio didn't have any. "Supposedly Rick Baker has this very accurate reproduction of the laboratory, and we were told that *YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN* recreated the sets, and this stuff was supposedly at Warner Bros. or Universal or someplace," said Sherman. "We could never track it down, and then we looked at *YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN* versus the original *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*. They didn't look at all alike."

Instead, Sherman had one of his assistants do a series of freeze frames of the laboratory scenes in *BRIDE*. "We ended up taking those stills, then having an art director draw up from those, and then having the construction department rebuild exactly what was originally built. There are scenes where we go back and forth from the [old] movie to our movie on the set, and so it had to be the exact same thing.

Not only did the equipment have to match; it also had to work. "It wasn't like [you could simply put in] a sofa and some chairs and a coffee table and an end table. It had to look like the original. All of this equipment had to actually operate and light up. The set builders did that, they were very good at it. Then at the end, the special effects department rigged all the explosive stuff. As far as the electrical Noah's Arcs and all those sorts of things, the construction department built all that." In fact, Sherman complained that "the people who built the set did a remarkable job, and the producers never gave them a screen credit, while they seemed to give everybody else a screen credit, like the station where they bought their gasoline."

Sherman added, "In a weird way, it was very challenging and very fun for a production designer. On the other hand, there is not a lot



The recreation of the Frankenstein laboratory set served double duty—for flashbacks and for Whale's nightmare (above).

of creativity, because basically what I did was I took a picture of something and copied it. But the process to get there was fun. It was interesting when we were at the studio: there were lots of other sound stages going, and people would walk onto the set in various stages of its construction, and at the beginning nobody really got it; then as it went along, people would walk in, stop for a minute, and then all of a sudden it would click that this was the laboratory from that movie."

The film also recreates the look of blighted, Expressionistic sets backed by painted backdrops. "That was from Bill [Condon]," attributed Sherman. "I've always, being a huge fan of those old movies, loved that very sort of fake-looking backdrop, the painted backdrops with forced perspective setwork, and I think there were some scenes in the movie when the monster is going through a graveyard and dragging the doctor along with him, that's where it started, and then we sort of took it from there and had our own back-

drop, built our set and had a tree made, but the idea was derived from the original movie."

While Sherman and Condon examined Whale's actual '50s abode, a house in Hancock Park was used instead, while another house supplied Whale's backyard studio and pool. "As far as the look we created for the movie, it was not so close to what his real house looked like. The studio was, because we had a painting of the studio I kind of copied to a certain degree, but still went off and did my own things. Oftentimes, what works in reality, cinematically isn't very interesting, so you have to take the original, then put your own influence and make it work for the movie.

"I think the studio [in the film] is most reflective of his personality, of his love of art, love of history, love of beauty, flowers of nature, art—all of that was really in the studio. He would have meetings in the house or have interviews in the house, but I think that if the house was that over-the-top, it might be telling. If it were more

sophisticated and more sort of in keeping with a man in his late fifties or early sixties who was a film director, that might be something more in keeping with the kind of image he tried to convey. Then in the studio where people didn't go was where all of this expressiveness came out. The house wasn't really where that happened at all."

Regarding the finished film, Sherman said, "I think that the world at large may have a problem with the movie as far as its homosexual subject, but friends of mine who have seen the movie, the thing that they all go away with is that they feel it is a very haunting story and a very disturbing story about how life, when taken wrong, can really fuck you up.

"I think that Bill was very lucky to get an actor like Ian McKellen, who can very subtly evoke those sort of feelings and those misgivings of life and not go over the top with it and not turn it into something melodramatic. It was a very peaceful, sad story and very haunting." **Dennis Fischer**



Condon watches a shot being filmed of the dummy stand-in for Ian McKellen.

“When you want people to finance your movie, they say, ‘What’s it about?’ This movie, like the novel, is hard to reduce. It’s unfair to say it’s one thing.”

and eccentric about Carter Burwell,” observed Condon. “He came back with something which it took me a few times listening to even get it. My best description of it is that the theme he came up with, the waltz, has gothic elements to it, but the waltz part of it, when you [hear] it in the trenches, it’s almost like an elegy for a lost Europe and a lost generation that was decimated by that war, so it’s a connection that’s purely [Burwell’s]. It’s a connection I never made—the film makes it, but he found it. He always goes in that way that’s unexpected and gets to the heart of something. We discussed it thematically, but that’s really him discovering something with his own approach, which I can only describe as original and eccentric. I can’t imagine anybody else who would have come up with exactly that idea.”

GODS AND MONSTERS has gone on to win acclaim at Sundance and a best director award for Condon at the Seattle Film Festival. But the movie’s future was not always certain. “I always had the faith that it would be [picked up for distribution] somehow, so I didn’t think about it,” he said. “I concentrated on the problems at hand, and that didn’t become the problem at hand until Sundance. We weren’t picked up on the first round because a number of distributors felt that the subject matter was obscure and difficult because of the gay stuff.”

“When I was a kid, movies had great people writing about them. What gets disappointing these days is that while there are still great writers writing about movies, there doesn’t

seem to be that same kind of dialogue going on, and I often find movie critics seem to be just extensions of studio publicity machines. [However,] the movie is coming out is that critics got behind it at Sundance. Peter Travers at *Rolling Stone*, Owen Gleibman at *Entertainment Weekly*, and Ken Turan at the *L.A. Times* wrote about it, and that’s what kept it alive to the point where it got released. I feel [this is] one example where they aren’t an extension of studio thinking but were working in the opposite direction.”

Eventually, the film found a home at Lion’s Gate. Condon said, “I look at the things I could do differently and all the things I wish I had more money for. I really am proud of the movie, but I can reshoot the movie in my head in a different way if I had more time to do it that way. I can see moments that I would just love to approach in a different way, but that’s the breaks. We only had four weeks to shoot it; money

concerned us all the time. I think we disguised it pretty well, but it was hard.”

Now that it is being released, GODS AND MONSTERS is a film which can appeal to a wide variety of audiences. In addition to aficionados of *cinéfantastique* and fans of Whale, who will admire its re-creations of classic horror films and monsters, the film can appeal to elderly audiences attracted to the story of a man with waning powers at the end of his life, to those acting aficionados who are fans of Sir McKellen’s work or even Brendan Fraser’s, to Clive Barker groupies as well as the gay audience interested in seeing a revealing depiction of one of the 20th century’s major gay artists (Whale made no secret of his sexual orientation while he was alive, and was known for throwing wild parties and living with producer David Lewis for years).

When considering the film’s possible audience, Condon kept thinking of films “like *CRYING GAME* and *MIDNIGHT COWBOY*. There is something charged dramatically about opposites, for people to be interested in that, to enjoy their differences in the beginning, especially if it has

been done with some humor, and then become satisfied that they connect.”

For myriad reasons, Whale’s work has demonstrated remarkable endurance. Condon believes this is because of his situation in that period at Universal. “His personality shines through. He put all of himself into [his films], and therefore [they are] unique and idiosyncratic. Just to think, here he makes *FRANKENSTEIN*—which has the effect of *JAWS*: it’s such a big hit, and the studio convinces him to do a sequel, and in the sequel he spends all of that time with this Dr. Praetorius character before Frankenstein’s [monster] even shows up, and that’s just totally Whale. That’s just totally him. And the Thesiger presence and performance and all that stuff is just because he had so much control over those things.

“It’s all there. I don’t think much of it’s conscious, but still it’s all there because this complicated man was able to put himself into the movie. Forget that AFI list; *Sight & Sound* did that survey of the best 360 movies, not just American, and Whale had four of them, and Altman didn’t have one.

“It’s weird because so often when you are meeting people who want to finance the movie, they say, ‘I don’t get what it’s about. What is it about? Put it into a sentence.’ This movie, as with the novel, is not about anything specific; it’s hard to reduce it. It’s unfair to say it’s one thing. This one, I think, has a lot.”

Whale as creator and Whale as monster, Whale as manipulator and Whale as victim, Whale in control of a situation and Whale vulnerable. GODS AND MONSTERS is not the typical, simplistic biopic like *MAN OF A THOUSAND FACES*, but rather a complex portrait of a very complex man and artist. □

In a jokey scene, Clay Boone tells the homosexual Whale that he himself is not gay—unaware of the phallic symbolism of the cigars both are smoking.



GODS AND MONSTERS

MAKEUP

Recreating the monster and his mate.

One of the challenges facing SOTA F/X on *GODS AND MONSTERS* was recreating Jack Pierce's makeup for the Frankenstein Monster so that it could be intercut with footage of the original. The lead artist for Sota's design was Scott Tebeau, who did the sculpture and application for the makeup effects house. Explained Roy Knyrim, who co-founded SOTA with Gary Macalusa, "The actor who played Frankenstein [Amir Aboulela]—his whole face was totally covered in about six prosthetics; it's not just a head piece. [We used] modern prosthetics on his face. Pierce had built up the head out of latex and cotton, and that was all blended off." The foam latex pieces were affixed by medical adhesive. The color of the pieces were matched with footage from the *A&E BIOGRAPHY* of Karloff, which presented a few color shots of him in full make-up sticking out his tongue at the camera.

The make-up for the elderly Karloff (Jack Betts), however, was primarily constructed of gelatin. "That was a new formulation of gelatin by a guy named Cass McClure," explained Knyrim. Gelatin has long been avoided because of its tendency to melt under hot lights; however, if the actor is kept air-conditioned when not in front of the camera, it can produce excellent results for short shoots. The primary advantage of gelatin is its translucency, as opposed to the opaqueness of latex, which is much more cost effective.

The elderly Karloff makeup took about six hours to apply; the Monster and his Mate took four to five hours, with the biggest difficulty deriving from the Bride's elaborate hairdo, a wig custom-made for the show. Makeup artist Mike Smithson was brought in to assist on the Bride makeup.

According to Knyrim, "The biggest trouble we had was they

used a new kind of film—I can't remember the name of the film stock now—which was really rough on the prosthetics. It shows a lot of the detail. Many times you can get away with bad edges and seams in regular films, but this stuff had to be really clean. But everything worked out." The new film stock ruled out using Pierce's original makeup techniques because the lack of grain would simply reveal too much.

Another challenge faced by Sota is that it was a mere three weeks until shooting before they were able to meet the actors to finalize the makeup designs. One thing that greatly assisted the effectiveness of the makeup was that the company was able to acquire access to actual lifecasts of Karloff, one made in 1939 and the other much later. Still, most of the footage of the young Karloff (including a scene of him halfway through the makeup process) was abandoned in editing, leaving only a brief glimpse near the end, when Whale is hallucinating figures from his past.

Fortunately for the production, clearances to use the copyrighted Universal makeups were forthcoming. Knyrim remembers that

when Sota F/X made up actor Richard Moll as the Frankenstein Monster for Universal's own *WEIRD SCIENCE* TV series, they were not allowed to copy the Pierce makeup. "They are real picky about it, and they actually got it all licensed, but it was all done with lawyers," he wryly observed.

Comparing approaches of the past with those of the present, Knyrim said, "In the old days, they weren't prosthetics. They were all built up right on the actors, every day, totally from scratch. Now, you lifecast the actor, sculpt the pieces and then you mold it, and you make the pieces out of molds. You didn't do things like that back then. The Frankenstein headpiece was all built up from scratch. They used that piece every day and it was not a molded thing. Today, the biggest advances are in materials like silicon and gelatin—old materials that are reformulated and you get pieces that are softer and more translucent. They look more like skin and move really well."

Additionally, Sota F/X prepared a nightmare sequence where Whale dreams that Clayton is removing his brain. Sota wanted to

Rosalind Ayres undergoes makeup treatment by SOTA F/X to become the Bride.



Amir Aboulela as the young Karloff in the Frankenstein Monster's makeup—an image glimpsed only briefly in the film's final cut.

stick with the look and techniques of the time, especially as the nightmare is inspired by Whale reviewing his old masterpiece. "We didn't want gory; we wanted everything dry," said Knyrim, "and it was powdery when his burned out brain comes out and the new one is put in. The brains were silicon for that, plus a silicon head that had a skull in it, and the hair was all punched in."

Commenting on the makeup of the Monster from the first film to its sequel, Knyrim noticed, "They really went for continuity. If you look closely at the beginning of *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*, the hair is singed off, and I never even realized that until I did *GODS AND MONSTERS*. They paid such attention to detail: the fire in the windmill at the end of the first movie singed his hair. As you watch the movie, it grows back, and toward the end is mostly back. The makeup is pretty much the same, though the head is slightly different. I'm sure that's because everything was thrown away at the end of the first one, and there were no molds at that time, so they couldn't copy it exactly, but they got as close as they could."

Said Knyrim, "It was an honor to be doing a Jack Pierce design. My partner and I grew up watching these movies, and I loved it. It was an absolute honor to work on a project like this. I had seen those movies since I was a little, little kid, and they are partly responsible for me doing what I am doing for a living. It was just a dream project."

Dennis Fischer

The Father of Frankenstein lives again in this brilliant film.

GODS AND MONSTERS

Lions Gate Films presents a Regent Entertainment Production in association with Gregg Fienberg. Written for the screen and directed by Bill Condon, from the novel *Father of Frankenstein* by Christopher Bram. Produced by Paul Colichman, Gregg Fienberg, Mark R. Harrist; executive producers, Clive Barker, Stephen P. Jarchow. Cinematography (Color, B&W, widescreen): Stephen M. Katz. Music: Carter Burwell. Editing: Virginia Katz. Production design: Richard Sherman. Make-up FX supervisors: Roy Kayrim & Gerry Macalusa, SOTA FX; makeup effects artist, Scott Tabeau. Costumes: Bruce Finlayson. Sound: Shawn Holden. Casting: Valorie Masalas. 11/98, 105 mins. Unrated.

James Whale.....	Ian McKellen
Clayton Boone.....	Brendan Fraser
Hanna.....	Lynn Redgrave
Betty.....	Lolita Davidovich
Harry.....	Kevin J. O'Connor
David Lewis.....	David Dukes
Edmund Kay.....	Jack Plotnick
Elsa Lanchester.....	Rosalind Ayres
Ernest Thesiger.....	Arthur Dignam
Colin Clive.....	Matt McKenzie
George Cukor.....	Martin Ferrero
Princess Magaret.....	Cornelia Hayes O'Herlihy
Elder Karloff.....	Jack Betts

by Patricia Moir
with Steve Biodrowski

Of the limited number of themes that may be considered universal, none has been explored as often as the common human need to love and be loved. And there is, in all our fictions, no tragedy as common as that of opportunity lost, of the pursuit of love thwarted by the ironic divisiveness of human nature. James Whale's *FRANKENSTEIN* might seem an unusual addition to the list of popular, enduring works of art, from *Tristan and Isolde* to *TITANIC*, which are centrally concerned with these themes. But both Christopher Bram's *Father of Frankenstein* and Bill Condon's film adaptation, *GODS & MONSTERS*, suggest a moving parallel between the suffering of Whale's



Bill Condon (center) directs Ian McKellen as James Whale and Rosalind Ayers as Elsa Lanchester, about to film the unveiling of the *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*.

sympathetic creature and the pain of all human estrangement.

Though nominally a "fictional biography" of the last days of James Whale, the film addresses issues much larger than those specific to that director's life. In a series of eloquently drawn encounters, Condon shows us the vast range of perceived differences that impede human communications and connections. Foremost is the relationship between Whale (McKellen) and Boone (Fraser), a potential friendship complicated and frustrated by misunderstandings of age and sexual orientation. The leading actors have wisely been given ample time to explore the subtle shades of their characters' emotions, creating complex

counterpoints between their gestures and expressions and their pitifully inadequate words. As the relationship intensifies, both characters reveal themselves physically as well as emotionally, Whale exposing the mortal frailty beneath his gentlemanly composure, and Boone literally removing the barriers which protect him from the older man's gaze. Condon's handling of these developments goes far beyond the sexual, suggesting an honesty which can only exist at the shared physical level of our humanity, and recognizing Whale's nostalgic recollections of past loves for what they truly are—a longing for the comfort of human contact and reassurance.

Reinforcing this theme is the relationship between Whale and his housekeeper (Redgrave), whose spoken religious disapproval of her employer's lifestyle is balanced by a wordless compassion for his physical weakness. Again, it is in the physical demonstration of affection that the characters' true feelings are revealed, as Hanna supports and tends to Whale's dignity in even the most undignified situations. And Whale's ex-lover, David Lewis (Dukes), in the briefest embrace, displays a tenderness that belies the coolness of his conversation.

Although it is Whale who actively seeks Boone's friendship, it is Boone who ultimately has the most to learn. Trapped in a series of empty sexual relationships—the brief scenes in which we see him

with his girlfriends are brutally uncommunicative—he finds himself capable, with Whale, of a depth of feeling he has never experienced before. Confronted with mortality, he becomes able to realize maturely the necessity of human contact and escape the deadening reality of his former life, just as Whale has escaped the "soul-killing place" of his own childhood.

"The only monsters are here," says Whale, tapping his forehead. It is in the intellectual complexities of language and social categorization that we are lost to each other. Our perceptions of "otherness" leave us, like Frankenstein's creature, wandering, alienated, and desperately alone. Condon makes this point powerfully and with remarkable economy—relying, in keeping with his themes, on visual rather than verbal expression. For such an intimate story, the film is surprisingly cinematic: Whale's flashbacks to his unhappy youth in England, his glory days in Hollywood, and his nightmares of World War I provide a sense of scale that effectively fills the wide screen. Even more important, the use of close-ups brings us into even more intimate contact with the actors' performances; substituting for the book's prose, these views allow us to "read" what the characters are thinking. These scenes are punctuated with images of Whale lurching through the blasted landscape of his horror classics in search of the "friend" that will relieve his suffering; and the expressionist vocabulary of *FRANKENSTEIN* is judiciously referenced in the scenes of Whale and Boone undergoing their dramatic, redeeming transformations.

The horror of these images is relieved only when Boone joins Whale in his symbolic wilderness to guide him to his rest; both the creature and his friend become human when they connect with each other. Condon's brief epilogue, in which we see Boone watching Whale's *BRIDE* with his son, reinforces the enduring importance of this message, as does our final glimpse of Boone walking alone in the rain. There is, in his playful imitation of the creature's gait, a celebration of the fact that, despite the singularity of every human life, there remains the possibility of joy in the shared recognition of a common humanity. □

Whale takes his gardener (Brendan Fraser) to a high-class party hosted by old rival George Cukor (Martin Ferrero) and Princess Margaret (Cornelia Hayes O'Herlihy).



LASERBLAST

By Dennis Fischer

JAMES WHALE ON DISC: *The director's four horror classics are a must-have.*

James Whale, a first-class '30s director, remains one of the finest practitioners of horror, with all four of his genre films being considered classics. All four are available on laserdisc.

The first of these is 1931's *FRANKENSTEIN* (MCA/Universal), which is currently presented in its restored edition that reinstates two important moments: when the monster first comes to life, Frankenstein (an ecstatic Colin Clive) utters the minor blasphemy, "Now I know what it feels like to be God," which was later obscured by a jump cut and a thunderclap on the soundtrack (a thunderclap is still allowed to obscure the last half of the statement); plus, during the famous scene where the Monster and Maria (Marilyn Harris) are throwing flowers into a pond, the Monster is seen ignorantly (and innocently) placing the little girl in the water as if she were another flower petal, clarifying that her death was an accident and erasing the implication, when her body is brought into town by her forlorn father, that she might have been sexually assaulted.

One can still be impressed by Whale's mastery of the film medium, as well as his sense of theatricality that makes Karloff's introduction as the Monster such a memorable moment. Edward van Sloan provides appropriate gravity; few are better at expressing madness than Dwight Frye as Fritz; Colin Clive creates the archetype of driven but tormented geniuses; and few performances are as riveting and masterful as Karloff's star-making turn as the alienated Monster, with its child-like innocence and destructive anger.

Universal has decided to give the film a first-class presentation. There is not only a theatrical trailer for the re-release of the film on the second side, which is presented in CAV, but in addition to several posters and stills from Forest J Ackerman's collection (including Jack Pierce applying the make-up to Karloff), the second side also repeats highlights from the first side to which viewers might want to give closer examination. The analog soundtrack is fairly good for a film this old, though it gets hard to hear during the storm scenes; picture is sharp and clear



The bonus material on MCA's laserdisc of *FRANKENSTEIN* includes behind-the-scenes photos, like this one of Jack Pierce applying makeup to Boris Karloff.

for a film of this vintage, allowing viewer's to access such details as Frankenstein tossing dirt into the face of the statue of death and indications of tumors on the neck of Frankenstein's father (Frederick Kerr) that suggest the bolts in the Monster's neck. (The father is desperate for a grandson, and the son has therefore fashioned one somewhat in his image).

BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN (MCA/Universal) has one of the oldest transfers in the Universal catalogue; fortunately, despite lacking digital sound and chapter stops of any kind, it is also one of the best, though the opening titles are a bit overscanned, eliminating a small portion of the image at the bottom of the screen. Throughout, the picture is sharp and clear, and Franz Waxman's magnificent score is surprisingly free of extraneous noise. When Whale reprises the angry mob from the previous film, he now adds a female contingent that was not present before, which allows for the famous scene

of the old woman thinking that she is assisting her husband out of the pit and for Una O'Connor's shrieking housemaid, who momentarily puzzles the Monster.

BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN remains Whale's greatest masterpiece, a daring mix of gothic horror and impish wit, with a show-stealing performance by Ernest Thesiger as the eccentric, prissy yet pithy Dr. Pretorius, who seeks to create a mate for the Monster. This transfers allows one to appreciate John Mescall's masterful lighting scheme and bold camera work, with striking angles and expressionistic shadows. Clive is once more nervously hysteric, while Karloff brings just the right touch of humanity to the Monster, who briefly enjoys a taste of friendship with O. P. Heggie's blind man. Whale seems to mock everything in sight and yet never condescends to the material, creating what is possibly the finest fright film ever made. The final section of the film is presented in

CAV, allowing a clear view of both Clive and Thesiger in the tower when it blows up, but the studio decided to let Frankenstein and his bride Elisabeth live, so a new sequence was shot and inserted showing the Monster allowing them to escape.

Unfortunately, while the laserdisc of *THE INVISIBLE MAN* (MCA/Universal) has a clean, digital soundtrack, the print itself leaves something to be desired. There are frequent white specks throughout, and some of the frames are even out of focus. It does appear to have been transferred from a re-released 35mm print, so the detail in contrast and shadings are still fairly strong.

Universal has transferred films under 90 minutes long with the second side in CAV; however, this is one film that might have benefited from having the first side in CAV, as the infamous unraveling scene, the chaos in the town, and the first meeting of Griffin (Claude Rains) with Kemp (William Harrigan) are presented in the first 30 minutes. However, the climax and Griffin's slow transformation to visibility are available in the still frame format. Additionally, the disc features 63 posters and photos from Ackerman's collection, including some behind-the-scenes shots of Whale directing the film.

Adapted from H. G. Wells' novel and kept at a spritely pace,

Elsa Lanchester, as the BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN, is wonderfully preserved in MCA's disc transfer.



REVIEWS

THE INVISIBLE MAN is peppered with memorable moments and bits of business. Having little more to work with than his voice, Rains does an impressive job of limning Griffith's exultation, frustration, and mounting megalomania. ("We'll start with a few murders. Small men. Great men. Just to show we make no distinction.") John Fulton's hand-crafted effects are marvelously created, although there is visual bleed in one scene where Griffin sits in a chair addressing Kemp, and the naked invisible man leaves shod footprints at the finale. Overall, the movie manages to mix horror and hilarity into a potent concoction that is as intoxicating as Griffin's monocaine-derived invisibility serum.

A nice benefit for new collectors is that THE OLD DARK HOUSE (Kino) has recently been reduced in price. Long unavailable on video because the rights had been transferred into private hands, Whale's classic comic tale of travellers stopping by a decidedly odd and dangerous country mansion was saved by director Curtis Harrington, who briefly recounts the tale at the end of the disc. Transferred from a highly quality dupe owned by film historian Scott MacQueen, this transfer of OLD DARK HOUSE features greater definition and clarity than any other print of the film I've seen, many of which have been taken from foggy 16mm dupes that obscure Whale's careful compositions.

The disc features two commentary tracks, a warm reminiscence by co-star Gloria Stuart (whose

In THE INVISIBLE MAN, James Whale's sense of humor resulted in a witty blend of humor and horror.



At left, Raymond Massey and Gloria Stuart (TITANIC) are disturbed by an encounter with the patriarch of a bizarre family in THE OLD DARK HOUSE.

appearance on the disc led to James Cameron's casting her in TITANIC), and an informative commentary by Whale biographer James Curtis. The disc also features production stills and a Whale filmography conveyed through lobby cards.

Once again, Thesiger steals the show as the prim Horace Femm, while Karloff can do little with his role as the brutish, silent butler Morgan, though there is a definite poignancy to the scene where he cradles Brember Wills. Whale's work is theatrical without ever becoming stagey; he knew how to milk both humor and suspense, and his sense of casting is superb, bringing together such cinema neophytes as Melvyn Douglas, Charles Laughton, Raymond Massey, and Eva Moore, who as Rebecca relishes in relating past family debaucheries, while Brember Wills is genuinely creepy as the ingratiating Saul Femm.

Also worthy of note to Whale fans is Voyager's transfer of the 1936 version of SHOW BOAT (also available on MGM's boxed set THE COMPLETE SHOW BOAT, along with the George Sidney remake). SHOW BOAT is one of Hollywood's greatest musicals and demonstrates that Whale was more than just a good horror film director, but a great director period, who employed some stunning expressionistic touches and elicited fine, cinematic performances from the stage-experienced cast. Especially memorable is the "Old Man River" sequence, sung definitively by Paul Robeson, which is filled with images of oppressed black workers. Unlike the color remake,

Whale does not give short shrift to the complementary black romantic subplot and is more daring in dealing with story's racial politics than the subsequent film.

The Voyager disc features a running commentary by scholar Miles Kreuger, who tends to give Whale short shrift, based apparently on the thought that the director was too English for such an American subject. The film has been transferred from 35mm master fine grain composite film elements, which means that while detail is good, some sequences are grainier than others.

Perhaps someday we'll see the release of such overlooked Whale gems as JOURNEY'S END, ONE MORE RIVER, and THE GREAT GARRICK, but to those who rejoice in a world of gods and monsters, nothing matches these Whale masterpieces, which have brought to life a number of unforgettable characters and can lay claim to being lasting influences on numerous subsequent filmmakers. Few directors have mastered Whale's ability to deftly limn a character portrait with a few lines of dialogue and bits of business. His monsters are memorable because they all have very human personalities with individual quirks, and they are forced, much like Whale himself, to face the difficulty of being outsiders, of being considered monsters by a world that little tolerates those who are different and fail to conform. This theme, and the humor with which he presents it, keep Whale's work timeless. Needless to say, these classics are all must-haves for any respectable film collection. □

FILM RATINGS

●●●●	Must see
●●●	Excellent
●●	Good
●	Mediocre
○	Fodder for MST-3K

BELOVED

Director: Jonathan Demme. Screenplay: Akosua Busia and Richard LaGravenese and Adam Brooks, from the novel by Toni Morrison. Touchstone, 10/98. 172 mins. R. With: Oprah Winfrey, Danny Glover, Thandie Newton, Kimberly Elise, Beah Richards.

Despite an advertising campaign that down-played the genre elements, this would-be Oscar-contender comes across like a combination of ROOTS and THE EXORCIST—a post-slavery era story about a woman named Sethe (Winfrey) who's haunted by the ghost of her dead daughter. The opening scene quickly establishes that the haunting is no mere metaphor: objects leap off shelves; the whole house shakes; and a hapless pooch is hurled by a supernatural force against a wall, knocking an eyeball out of its socket. Eight years later, in an almost intentionally overdone sequence, Danny Glover as Paul D. takes what must be the longest walk ever down a short corridor as he enters the house, his progress impeded by flashing red images suggesting the restless spirit.

The psychic assault ceases when the feral young woman, Beloved (Thandie Newton), mysteriously wanders out of the swamp and takes up residence with Sethe. It soon becomes apparent that she is the dead daughter, somehow returned to life, and her unsettling presence disturbs the balance between Sethe and Paul's growing relationship. After much screen time, the horrible truth about Sethe's guilt in her daughter's death is revealed in a grisly flashback, and Sethe, trying to atone, sinks deeper into madness while trying to serve her Beloved's growing demands.

The film is always engaging, thanks to strong performances by Winfrey, Glover, and Newton, but the script (adapted by three different writers from the novel by Toni Morrison) is not as tightly structured as one might wish, resulting in a diffuse, schizophrenic effect that feels like two different movies; plus, the ultimate point of combining historical drama with horror remains elusive—something about escaping from a past that won't stay buried. Fortunately, the individual scenes hold our attention throughout the lengthy running time, even if we're not sure why they all had to be in the same movie. And director Demme manages to make the tone seem unified, even if the story is not. He treats the intrusion of the supernatural horror without apology or reticence, but somehow neither does he let it overwhelm the drama, instead making it fit right into the realistic world being portrayed. The result is an effectively creepy historical horror film, all the more frightening for being told with such conviction

●● 1/2 Steve Biodrowski

The new Avengers are way too cool, but not all that hip

THE AVENGERS

Warner Bros presents a Jerry Weintraub production. Produced by Jerry Weintraub. Directed by Jeremiah Chechik. Screenplay by Don MacPherson, based on the TV series created by Brian Clemens. Cinematography (Technicolor): Roger Pratt. Composer: Joel McNeely; "Avengers Theme" by Laurie Johnson. Editing: Mick Audsley. Production design: Stuart Craig; supervising art director, Neil Lamont; set design, Stephanie MacMillan. Visual effects supervisor: Nick Davis, VFX HQ. Costume designer: Anthony Powell. Sound (Dolby Digital): Clive Winter. Executive producer: Susan Ekins. Casting, Susie Figgis. 8/98, 89 mins. Rated PG-13.

John Steed.....Ralph Fiennes
Mrs. Peel.....Uma Thurman
Sir August DeWynter.....Sean Connery
Invisible Jones.....Patrick Macnee
Mother.....Jim Broadbent
Father.....Fiona Shaw
Billy.....Eddie Izzard

by Patricia Moir

There are essentially two ways of resurrecting a popular movie or TV show: The first is to reproduce faithfully the look and tone of the past. But such films always run the risk of disappointing the expectations of older viewers. The second approach is to retool the premise so that it will attract a new, contemporary following. This strategy, however, often results in an incoherent mixture of incompatible styles.

THE AVENGERS tries to have it both ways, and fails miserably all around. Randomly combining elements of both the quintessentially British '60s TV show and the American action-adventure genre of the '90s, the film is little more than a series of unconnected vignettes. Like clips in a movie trailer, its scenes hold the promise of a plot that never materializes. The result is a visually intriguing but dispassionate viewing experience.

Contributing to the lack of emotional appeal is a profound misunderstanding of the '60s "cool" of the TV series. The look is right, the banter is witty, but the characters themselves are unappealing. The original Avengers were cool, to be sure, but Patrick Macnee and Diana Rigg brought humor and charm to their roles. It was always fun to watch this dissimilar but intelligent pair comment, with analytical bemusement, on the surreal, cartoonish Avengers world. And though there was a definite sense of romantic potential to their partnership—they were evidently the only sane people in England—the series wisely avoided of any overt displays of affection.

As played by Fiennes and



Thurman and Fiennes are so frigidly detached in their roles that it is hard to believe anything is happening to them at all.

Thurman, Steed and Peel are so frigidly detached that it is hard to believe that anything is happening to them at all. This approach might have been marginally effective had it remained consistently sophisticated. Unfortunately, the dialogue, in a very un-Avengers-like display of bad taste, frequently descends to the level of leering sexual double entendre. The reasoning behind this is incomprehensible, as it both undermines the characterizations and defies marketing logic. (The appeal of unresolved romantic tension is well established—witness the success of THE X-FILES.) Furthermore, it is unclear just why these two should be attracted to each other in the first place. Thurman's Peel (and again this is entirely the fault of the writers) is often abrasively uncompromising and contemptuous. And Fiennes's Steed, unlike the self-assured gentleman of the series, seems to be a rather weak fellow who is upheld by tradition, rather than the other way around. One gets a dismaying overall impression of two not-very-confident people pretending to be blasé.

Great pains have been taken to reproduce the offbeat, surreal look of the Avengers world, but this,

too, is unsuccessful. Each episode of the television show plunged Steed and Peel into a new, weird, but thematically coherent adventure which took its tone from the megalomania of the particular villain of the week. Giant mechanical wasps? A boardroom full of men in teddy bear costumes? Such devices are in keeping with the original series' sensibilities. The problem is that they don't have anything to do with the rest of the film, or with its antagonist, Sir August De Wynter. (Connery is, as usual, more than competent, but the best thing I can say about his character is that I found the name amusing.) And the *non sequiturs* don't stop there. There is a nasty Mrs. Peel clone who seems to have been included in order to generate a subplot based on mistaken identity (this might have been interesting if there had been any possibility of the audience confusing the two characters). There is a visually inventive scene in which Mrs. Peel must navigate a hallucinogenic maze (a nifty reference to the famous "House That Jack Built" Avengers episode), but it ends so abruptly that any sense of horror or suspense is quickly lost. And what are we to make of

the unflappable Mr. Steed veering suddenly into grimacing, action-hero mode to man a machine gun from the back of a speeding car? (Note to Fiennes: Steed never looked as though he was exerting himself.)

Production designer Stuart Craig, set decorator Stephanie McMillan, and costumer Anthony Powell provide what little continuity there is in an otherwise incongruous pastiche. The costumes are superb—they work much more effectively than the dialogue at suggesting character. There is a thoughtful repetition of globe-sphere motifs throughout the film, and the majority of the sets have an economy and crispness which makes THE AVENGERS pleasant (though unaffecting) to look at. It seems a shame that this talented team's achievements are reduced, in the absence of any real drama, to an abstract show of aesthetic virtuosity.

For all the artistry evident in THE AVENGERS, it is a disappointing, and, for those of us who recall the series, a mildly depressing film. I advise aspiring designers to take a look, but those hoping for engaging entertainment need not attend. □

ART HOUSE

By Dan Persons

KILLER CONDOMS & CANNIBAL MUSICALS A Traumatic Twosome from Troma.

What with a certain homophobic corps of fundamentalists currently trying to legitimize their bigotry with newspaper ads and federal legislation, there might not be a better time for the release of the German import, **KILLER CONDOM** (Troma, 8/98, unrated, 90 mins). The story of a gay police detective (Udo Samel) scouring the grungiest of New York's hot-sheet hotels in search of a toothy, animated prophylactic and the fiends who introduced it into the urban ecology, the film takes religious fanaticism, political puritanism, and gay self-loathing head-on, coming up with that rarest of all commodities: a German comedy that's actually funny. Granted, it's a little odd watching establishing shots photographed on Broadway intercut with interiors where everyone's spouting *Deutsche*, and the humor, as it frequently is in German imports, can be something of an acquired taste (the detective is a Sicilian immigrant broadly named Luigi Mackeroni, while the condom, designed by the decidedly unmirthful H.R. Giger, is an es-

Cashing in on **SOUTH PARK**, Troma released Trey Parker and Matt Stone's **CANNIBAL: THE MUSICAL**



The H.R. Giger-designed star of the German art house horror-comedy, **KILLER CONDOM**.

pecially nasty bit of castrating rubber). Yet director Martin Walz works his black-comic tale—which he and Ralf Koenig adapted from Koenig's comic, *Condom des Grauens*—with an appealing vigor, and you've got to admire a film in which a character proclaims his confidence in his own sexuality by planting a big, wet, juicy one on an attractive callboy (to the applause of surrounding spectators!). Quick, somebody send Trent Lott a copy!

Troma is running **KILLER CONDOM** on a double-bill in some markets with Trey Parker and Matt Stone's **CANNIBAL: THE MUSICAL** (Troma, 8/98, unrated, 95 mins.), clearly trying to capitalize on the duo's **SOUTH PARK** success (along with an ill-fated attempt to tie in with the release of the ill-fated Parker-Stone starrer, **BASEKTBALL**). Parker seems to be the major auteur of this previously direct-to-video title—he directed, wrote, and stars—with Stone taking credit as co-producer and actor (although I'll be damned if I can tell you which role he played). In any case, you can see the glimmers of **SOUTH PARK** in the petty bickerings of a group of miners who lose their way on a trek to a gold rush in Colorado, and in twisted musical numbers that offer, in one case, a demented, carnivorous trapper spouting the inspired cou-

plet: "The brains of an antelope/Taste like cantaloupe." The problem with a film called **CANNIBAL: THE MUSICAL**, however, is that sooner or later you have to contend with the little issue of that first word in the title. Indeed, once the starving, crazed miners begin chowing down on each other, the film never fully recovers, much as Parker tries to show that his main protagonist, Alfred Packer (Parker himself) is essentially blameless. Too bad, because the closing minutes feature a marvelously absurd, **OKLAHOMA**-style dance number built around Packer's impending execution that would have given Agnes DeMille fits. At the very least, it gives you a good inkling as to the genesis of Mr. Hankey.

It's one thing to be confronted with films that riff off other films, but when we get films that riff off films that riff off other films, we may well have reached some sort of critical mass. **SIX-STRING SAMURAI** (Palm Pictures, 9/98, 91 mins) has a certain, grungy charm, but feels too much like a self-conscious conglomeration of every post-modern filmmaker—from W.D. Richter to Alex Cox to Quentin Tarantino—who ever fried his brain on simultaneous doses of surf music and **ATTACK OF THE CRAB MONSTERS**. One has to give director Lance Mungia credit for the ordeals he

endured to pull this off (here's one case where they should have shot the press notes instead), but the story of lone, martial-arts guitarist Buddy (Jeffrey Falcon—who also did production and costume design) and abandoned waif The Kid (Justin McGuire) heading across a post-apocalyptic, American wasteland for the promised land of Lost Vegas is far less of a rush than one would hope. Blame blind ambition—the filmmakers have clearly bitten off far more than they could stylistically chew. Still, any sort of ambition is welcome these days, and a single, engaging scene in which Buddy goes through increasingly elaborate contortions in order to keep his young charge from crying

shows that Mungia can connect with a human truth when he puts his mind to it. My advice, Lance: drop all that po-mo crap and find a real story.

A new mother, alone while her husband is away on a business trip, is confronted by a young drifter who asks to camp out on the woman's lawn. The woman (Sasha Hails), nostalgic for the moment of kindness shown her by a shepherd during her own drifter days, assents, bringing the sullenly feral girl (Marina de Van) into her house and her life in **SEE THE SEA** (October, unrated, 52 mins). The short, bracingly disturbing film by French director Francois Ozon is an impressive display of sustained suspense—the woman is so wrapped up in her own, wistful memories that she fails to see the barely concealed contempt with which the girl holds her; a sequence in which the girl lures the woman into a nearby beach's forest-cum-cruising-grounds feels like a sex-drenched retelling of *Little Red Riding Hood* (an impression only emphasized by de Van's rather lupine performance). The ending is a foregone conclusion (in fact, one of the film's shortcomings is the woman's inability to foresee the outcome despite numerous, glaring warnings), but when it comes it still hits like a sledgehammer. A quick, accomplished dip into the dark side. □

Competing vampire films turn into the Clone Wars.

BLADE

New Line Cinema presents an Amen Ra Films production in association with Imaginary Forces. Produced by Peter Frankfurt, Wesley Snipes, Robert Engleman. Directed by Stephen Norrington. Screenplay by David S. Goyer, based on characters created by Marv Wolfman, Gene Colan. Cinematography (color, widescreen): Theo Van De Sande. Music: Mark Isham. Editing: Paul Rubell. Production design: Kirk M. Petrucelli; art director, Barry Chusid. Makeup effects: Greg Cannom. Costume design: Sanja Mikovic Hays. Sound (Dolby digital): Lee Orloff. Casting: Rachel Abrams, Jory Weitz. Executive producers: Lynn Harris, Stan Lee, Avi Arad, Joseph Calamari; co-producers, Andrew J. Norae, Jon Divens. 8/98, 121 mins. Rated R.

Blade.....Wesley Snipes
Deacon Frost.....Stephen Dorff
Whistler.....Kris Kristofferson
Karen.....N'Bushe Wright
Dragonetti.....Udo Kier
Racquel.....Traci Lords

JOHN CARPENTER'S VAMPIRES

A TriStar Pictures release of a Largo Entertainment-Film Office presentation of a Storm King production. Produced by Sandy King. Directed by John Carpenter. Screenplay by Carpenter, Don Jacoby, Dan Mazur, based on the novel *Vampires* by John Steakley. Cinematography (Foto-Kem color, Panavision): Gary B. Kibbe. Music: John Carpenter. Editing: Edward A. Warschilka. Production design: Thomas A. Walsh; art director, Kim Hix. Makeup effects: KNB EFX Group; special effects, Darrell D. Pritchett. Costume design: Robin Michel Bush. Sound (Dolby digital/DTS): Hank Garfield. Executive producer: Barr Potter; co-producer, Don Jacoby. Casting: Reuben Cannon, Eddie Dunlop. 10/98, 104 mins. Rated R.

Jack Crow.....James Woods
Tony Montoya.....Daniel Baldwin
Katarina.....Sheryl Lee
Valek.....Thomas Ian Griffith
Father Adam Guiteau.....Tim Guinee
Cardinal Alba.....Maximilian Schell



BLADE (Snipes) tortures a vampire for information about a ritual that can render her master invulnerable.

by Steve Biodrowski

Here is an interesting example of Hollywood double-think: two films, released within months of each other, that have essentially the same plot. Each deals with a vengeful vampire slayer, whose parent(s) were bitten and/or killed by vampires; each protagonist is portrayed as ruthlessly efficient, almost as brutal as his quarry. Each begins with its best sequence, an attack on a vampire stronghold. In each, the female lead is bitten early on, and much of the rest of the plot concerns whether she will become a vampire. Finally, in each film the vampire antagonist is searching for a ritual/object that will render him virtually invulnerable by sacrificing of the protagonist.

What sets the films apart, mostly, is their stylistic reference points. Whereas *VAMPIRES* is clearly meant to look like a Western, *BLADE* takes its inspiration from Hong Kong martial arts fantasy films. This approach is a welcome one, as it allows Wesley Snipes to show off his athletic prowess, and it elevates the character's abilities to the point where we do believe he could go up against a roomful of the undead and still triumph. Indeed, the real triumph of the film is these sequences (which capture the essence of Fant-Asia films like *SAVIOR OF SOULS* and *ZU: WARRIORS OF THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN* far better than Carpenter's *BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA*). The story telling, on the other hand, leaves quite a bit to be desired. Blade's hunt for

Deacon Frost (Dorff) is mostly staged as a series of action set-pieces, with little narrative momentum. What plot there is concerns Deacon's attempts to overthrow the pureblooded aristocracy of those who were born vampires (not changed from being mortals) and turn himself into the uber-undead. As long as the confrontations are portrayed in terms of sword play, the film is on sure footing (despite all those fantastic leaps in the air), but once the guns start firing, director Stephen Norrington just doesn't know when to stop—or how to make it look like the hero might actually be in danger. And the Disney Haunted House-style effects at the finale take the film out of the action-horror genre into outright fantasy, undermining much of the suspense. Here, David Goyer's script falters badly, abandoning its

pseudo-scientific approach in favor of a blood-drenched magic ceremony at odds with the previous exposition. Equally misguided is the use of sunblock to allow vampires to walk in daylight: when the idea was first advanced in *SUN-DOWN* ten years ago, it was meant to be a joke; now we're supposed to take it seriously.

Fortunately, Snipes is able to carry the film past these difficulties on the strength of his performance, which is all steel hard exterior masking the driven obsession glimpsed just beneath the surface (denying any friendship in his partnership with mentor Whistler, he subtly undercuts his own words). As Whistler, Kristofferson has a nice world weary attitude that allows him to deliver most of the exposition without boring viewers, and Udo Kier is great as head of the old guard vampires. Only Dorff is disappointing: though not untalented, he comes across like Leonardo DiCaprio gone bad; unlike Griffith in *VAMPIRES*, he never emerges as a truly threatening opponent.

All in all, *JOHN CARPENTER'S VAMPIRES* (which was reviewed more fully last issue) emerges as the better film, if only because Carpenter skills as a craftsman far exceed those of the flashy Norrington. *VAMPIRES'* plot isn't that much more well developed than of *BLADE*, but Carpenter always keeps the film moving forward, so that the audience is not simply sitting back and waiting for the next big confrontation. On the other hand, those confrontations in *BLADE* really are highlights that are worth the price of admission alone. □

Just before completing a ritual that will render him virtually invulnerable, the villainous Valek (Thomas Ian Griffith) perishes at the climax of *VAMPIRES*.



THE WATCHER

By Dan Cziraky

When the Sci-Fi Channel debuted more than six years ago, it was almost entirely composed of syndicated fare from decades past, as well as scads of old movies. Today, while you can still catch reruns of *QUANTUM LEAP*, *THE BIONIC WOMAN*, and *THE TWILIGHT ZONE*, there is a considerable amount of original programming on cable-TV's only genre-oriented station.

SLIDERS, of course, started life on Fox Broadcasting, ending its three-season run in a Friday night slot just before the dark, brooding *MILLENNIUM*. Fox wanted the series to be a counterbalance to the Chris Carter thriller, so the show was pretty light-hearted; and, frankly, during its second and third seasons, light-headed. Because the show wasn't allowed to explore the more serious possibilities of its infinite alternate-Earths premise, several key production members left, as well as cast members John Rhys-Davies ("Arturo") and Sabrina Lloyd ("Wade"). Since moving to a Monday-night, 9 PM (Eastern) time-slot on June 8, the series has definitely made changes for the better.

Picking up from the third season cliff-hanger, the show's fourth season premiere, "Genesis," introduced several new concepts into the series' continuity. With the new cast set an plot elements in place, *SLIDERS* then began producing some exceptional episodes. While, at first glance, the bald, fanged, brutish Kromaggs could be mistaken for low-rent Klingons, a la classic *STAR TREK*, they are much more than all-purpose villains. Having evolved separately from Homo sapiens, the Kromaggs view themselves as superior beings. Their technology is more advanced, and they've eradicated emotions. Okay, so does this just make them *DOCTOR WHO* Daleks without the pepper-

In episodes like "Girl Plugged In," Sci-Fi Channel's original series *WELCOME TO PARADOX* explores social and ethical issues, a la *THE TWILIGHT ZONE*.



THE SC-FI CHANNEL

New series replaced those endless old reruns.



One of several series that originated on other networks, *SLIDERS* has actually improved since moving to the Sci-Fi Channel.

pots, or is there more to them than blustering throughout the alternate Earths? Yes, and no, I'm afraid. Their freakish faces and penchants for chomping on fresh eyeballs, coupled with their ruthless, militaristic society, will keep them from ever converting into honorable warrior allies, the way the Klingons did between *STAR TREK* and *ST:TNG*. However, they do cross-breed with humans to create slave-warriors, thereby bringing up all sorts of juicy social issues and allowing for the thoughtful, intelligent stories that were prohibited on Fox. SFC also has the rights to the shows from the first three seasons, and aired selective repeats prior to the June debut of season four. For once, things are looking pretty good for *SLIDERS*, and it could develop into a decent offering, despite itself.

Speaking of *STAR TREK*, September saw SFC's launch of *STAR TREK: THE SCI-FI CHANNEL SPECIAL EDITIONS*. As part of their five-year licensing arrangement with Paramount for classic *TREK*, all 79 episodes have been restored to their original broadcast lengths, and digitally remastered. Between three to eight minutes of material has been returned, not seen since the shows aired on NBC-TV in the 1960's. In order to fill out the 90-

minute time-slot (weeknights 7:30-9 PM, Eastern time), SFC has also enlisted series stars William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy to host each episode. In an odd twist, however, Shatner will host initially; then, in December, Nimoy will host. Additionally, various cast and crew members, as well as guest stars, will also share their memories of the show in separate segments. Of special note to *ST* fans is that the original pilot, "The Cage," has had its black-and-white segments computer-colored, using the existing color footage as a guide. This will let SFC air "The Cage" in full-color, for the first time ever, in December. So, even if you already own the pre-recorded episodes of the classic series, you may want to tape these SFC SPECIAL EDITION broadcasts if you wish to possess the ultimate version of this series.

In August, SFC premiered an all-new, one-hour anthology series, *WELCOME TO PARADOX*. In the futuristic, domed city of Betaville, where technology can make your dearest dreams and wildest nightmares come true, the ever-present Paradox (Michael Philip) introduces each episode. Produced by Chesler/Perlmutter, the company responsible for *THE HITCHHIKER* and *STRANGERS*, the series is taking its stories from such top genre authors as Alan Dean Foster, A.E. Van Vogt and James H. Shmitz, Donald Westlake, and Ron Goulart.

The format provides a loose enough framework to be creatively free, but the Betaville setting keeps things interesting. The futuristic metropolis has its inhabitants lulled into complacency with non-stop virtual reality programming, but there are those who rebel against the system. In the premiere episode, "Our Lady of the Machine," Detective Ángel Cardenas (Steven Bauer) uses his intuitive powers to investigate an elaborate extortion scheme, as a false priest uses a holographic image of the Virgin Mary (Suzy Joachim) to "convert" non-believers. He goes undercover to find the source of the hologram, but soon learns that things are more complex than they seem after the false Madonna heals him of an old, painful wound. Has the computer-generated Holy Mother somehow gained truly divine powers? In the James Tiptree, Jr., story "The Girl Who Was Plugged In," ruthless corporate executive John Ritchie (Hrothgar Matthews) saves P. Burke (Megan Leitch), a pathetic, homeless woman, from suicide, only to use her in a devious scheme to subvert the laws banning all forms of advertising. Burke is neurally linked to Delphi (*THE NANNY*'s Nicholle Tom), a beautiful, artificially created young woman who is, essentially, a "living doll," with no mind of her own. Burke will mentally operate Delphi, giving her the emotional depth that

CINEMA

By Steve Biodrowski

THE GORE SCORE, PART II WWII Meets Dawn of the Dead

most celebrities lack. Delphi will appear in virtual reality shows and make personal appearances, endorsing whatever products the powerful GTX conglomerate wishes her to. Burke agrees to this new, seemingly idyllic life, but is soon confused by the attention lavished on the gorgeous Delphi, something Burke never received in her former life. When Delphi meets the rebellious son (Peter Stebbings) of the head of GTX, Burke starts to defy Ritchie and GTX, which has painful results. Before long, Burke becomes convinced it is possible for her and Delphi to merge into a single entity, thereby breaking GTX's hold on both of them—even if it means her death.

WELCOME TO PARADOX follows SLIDERS on Mondays at 10:00 p.m. This slot is late enough that the series can explore serious, adult-oriented issues. "Our Lady of the Machine" looks at faith and belief in the face of advanced technology. "The Girl Who Was Plugged In" examines not only the ethics of business and the uses of genetic engineering, but also the basics of humanity. These are elements that tie PARADOX to such venerated genre anthologies as THE TWILIGHT ZONE and THE OUTER LIMITS, but, so far, also give it its own, unique voice. Unlike the new OUTER LIMITS or CBS' revived TWILIGHT ZONE, PARADOX has no history to build on, freeing it to create its own artistic sense. Granted, Michael Philip's Paradox (referred to merely as "The Host" in the show's credits) has a Rod Serling-esque quality. Frankly, the episodes I've seen would actually benefit from having the brief host segments cut. Not that Philip is a bad actor, but his presence is intrusive, and the character is usually restating the obvious at the episodes' endings.

It's good to see the Sci-Fi Channel trying to break free of endlessly repeating LOST IN SPACE, DARK SHADOWS, and BATTLESTAR GALACTICA. By rescuing discarded series like MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000, POLTERGEIST: THE LEGACY, and SLIDERS, breathing new life into STAR TREK, and attempting bold new shows like WELCOME TO PARADOX, the Channel is finally starting to fulfill the potential it has always possessed. Programming vice-president Barry Schulman had a lot to be proud of as he left the network in August. □

I must say I was amused by Steven Spielberg's attempt to turn World War II into a DAWN OF THE DEAD-type horror movie with SAVING PRIVATE RYAN (7/98, DreamWorks, 169 mins, R). The graphic carnage is quite effectively shocking, and it is nicely balanced with quieter moments (courtesy of Robert Rodat's script) that lend some poignancy to the story. What is perplexing, however—especially in light of my previous comments regarding explicit cinematic violence (CFQ 30:2)—is the universal accolades that have befallen the film. People who would gag in disgust at a George Romero or a Lucio Fulci film, are applauding enthusiastically for an opus that rips through bodies with as much enthusiasm as the most carnivorous zombie.

What is even more perplexing is that the overwhelmingly favorable response is in direct contrast to last year's STARSHIP TROOPERS, which was roundly trashed for taking gore to new levels. SAVING PRIVATE RYAN and STARSHIP TROOPERS may not seem to have much in common at first glance—one being historical, the other futuristic—but both are essentially war films that try to bring the brutality of battle home to the viewer with the most impact possible. So why is one revered and the other reviled? I think there are two basic reasons.

The first has to do with the perceptions of "reality." As the black, urban films of the last ten years have shown, you can get away with a lot on screen—and be



In SAVING PRIVATE RYAN, Spielberg films the Normandy invasion like DAWN OF THE DEAD, but historical reality protects him from accusations of excess.

praised for it—if you convince critics that you're telling it like it is because you've been there. Spielberg's true achievement with RYAN is not so much in the filmmaking (although that is in itself estimable) but rather in convincing the media and the public that he is offering a realistic, almost cinema verite depiction of events—this despite the fact that he has never served in the armed forces and has probably never even seen a person shot, much less killed. The cinematic techniques he uses in the battle scenes are effective and *artful*; that doesn't mean you're seeing the real thing.

The second reason that the bloodshed has been so widely accepted in RYAN is that it is effec-

tively used to inspire hatred for the on-screen enemy, so that viewers receive a tremendously satisfying catharsis upon seeing the bad guys blown away. In TROOPERS, director Paul Verhoeven used a similar approach, but with a significant difference: he understands the powerful progandistic effect that such scenes have, and underlines them with heavy irony; he makes you want to feel the glory of battle, and then undercuts the glory with gore. And most of all, the script by Ed Neumeier plants hints that leave one in doubt about the righteousness of "our" side.

Some have derided this approach as "politically correct," but that term could actually be far more accurately applied to RYAN. Instead of raising uncomfortable questions, Spielberg's film provides easy answers that conform to prevailing political views and encourage our self-satisfied sense of decency and goodness. By going back to WWII (the last "good" war) yet another time, Spielberg has not really advanced all that far beyond RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK. He's still using Germans as dehumanized villains who deserve only to be obliterated, and any doubt about this on the part of the characters is mere sentimental stupidity. Whereas Verhoeven satirized gung-ho hysteria, Spielberg masterfully makes you feel that it's a good thing to stop thinking and just pull the trigger. □

In STARSHIP TROOPERS, the glory of battle was undercut by gore that outraged many critics—who later praised the equally graphic SAVING PRIVATE RYAN.



VIDEOFILE

By John Thonen

DIRECT-TO-VIDEO DRIVE: The director's cut reaches finish line.

The producer's cut of *DRIVE* premiered on HBO early in '98 and more recently on video from A-Pix Entertainment. Before the end of the year, a DVD release from Simitar will offer audiences director Steve Wang's cut of the film. It's unlikely viewers will find either version a timeless classic, but both are fun, escapist entertainment filled with jaw-dropping action, charming characters and slightly goofy comic hijinks. The differences between the two versions are very telling of the schism that exists between a director's vision and a producer's mentality.

DRIVE's storyline is centered around Toby Wong (Mark Dascoscos), a Chinese assassin who carries a "bio-engine" in his chest which gives him near-superhuman capabilities. Wong, however, has fallen in love with a rebel leader he was to kill. He has come to recognize the inhumanity of his superiors, and of himself. Raised from birth to be an obedient killing machine, he bolts, escaping to the U.S. His view of our country is largely derived from movies, and he is lacking many basic bits of knowledge, among them, the ability to drive a car. With professional killer Vic Madison (Pyper Ferguson) in pursuit, Wong reluctantly grabs unemployed songwriter Malik Brody (Kadeem Hardison) to chauffeur his escape.

The most noticeable, and an-

Impressive miniature work belies the film's low-budget origins.



Director Steve Wang on the set of his futuristic martial arts action pic, *DRIVE*.

noying, change inflicted on *DRIVE* is the new music. The original score by David Williams (*THE PROPHECY*) was a perfect complement to the film. *DRIVE* is a bigger-than-life adventure, with more than a little tongue-in-cheek attitude, and Williams' score was perfectly in tune with the on-screen proceedings. Walter Werzowa's replacement music seems to belong to a different film. Often ominous, with militaristic undertones, the music would be fine in a low-budget *DIE HARD* clone, but works against what is on-screen here.

Wang's biggest triumph is in taking a standard action tale and making it unique through an infusion of off-the-wall humor. The producer's version eliminates these sequences wherever possible, creating an oddly out of balance film. The director's cut evenly distributes its comedic touches as a counterbalance—moments of relief—before the next harrowing action scene. In one of the dazzling stunt sequences, Wong and Brody escape from the top of a refinery by using the chain of their handcuffs to slide down a cable. Once they hit the ground, the handcuffs have become red hot from friction, and they plunge their arms into a barrel of water, breathing a sigh of relief through a cloud of steam. The producers cut this final moment. The stunt is still exciting, but the rhythm of the scenes that follow are thrown off by trimming the gag.

With Wang's pace altered by the unwarranted re-edit, the re-

maining moments of lighthearted mayhem often feel intrusive, like crudely inserted afterthoughts rather than part of a cleverly conceived pattern of alternating action and humor.

But not all of the cuts are so harmful. Wang's version contains several moments of absolute lunacy when Madison and his partner Hedgehog (a delightful Tracey Waters) are watching TV. The film's story takes place in indeterminate near-future, and the game shows and TV series depicted are probably too goofy for most to appreciate. Trimming them may have actually benefited the film. Unfortunately, some had to be left, due to the importance of the character's conversation, and seem even more out of place without the context of the trimmed TV scenes.

Wisely, the producers don't play much with the film's wall-to-wall action. These sequences are so well executed, and so much fun, that it's hard to choose the best one. They are all a joy and any one of them better than anything in any other Western-produced martial arts film.

The two versions of *DRIVE* create something of a win-win situation for video renters. The producer's version remains an above-average bit of direct to video action fare, with just enough surviving humor to distinguish it from the myriad of cheap action films on the video shelves. The director's cut of the film offers the rare chance to see a good film made substantially better. It's one more good reason to buy a DVD player. □

DIRECTORIAL DRIVE: Steve Wang in the low-budget fast lane.

By John Thonen

Steve Wang may be best known for his makeup work (*HELL COMES TO FROGTOWN*, *BATMAN RETURNS*), but as a director he has amply demonstrated his flair for the Asian superhero drama with *THE GUYVER*, *GUYVER 2*, and now *DRIVE*. In order to meet a start date, Wang had to make major script changes with scant time for a rewrite, adding humor, often by ad-libbing on the set. In spite of the unapproved changes, the producers were thrilled with the footage and gave Wang creative (if not budgetary) carte blanche to make the film he envisioned.

After high-scoring test screenings, the producers began to talk about theatrical play and high-dollar sales. "That was unrealistic," said Wang. "It's probably the best low-budget action film that Overseas Film Group ever made, but it's still a low-budget action film." Sales at the '96 MIFED film mart were below these inflated expectations, causing OFG to decide the problem was Wang's cut of the film. "It was the most amazing and positive experience I've ever had," said Wang of *DRIVE*'s production. "Of course, it had to end sometime." It was with their re-edit that Wang's producers pulled the carpet out from under him. "They aren't nice about it. They don't come and say what would you think of...?" They just tell you what you're going to do, and if you don't, they have someone else do it. They did a really bad short version—editing 101 stuff." Test screening scores dropped noticeably, leading to a somewhat improved 3rd cut. To add insult to injury David Williams jaunty score was replaced with competent, but all-too-typical action film music.

"They're totally sheltered," Wang said of the typical film producer. "They don't live in the real world. I tried arguing; I tried logic. They just quit inviting me to the meetings. There's this perception that directors have control in this town. It's just not true. The biggest lie they tell is that 'It's your movie.' That's just to get you to work the 22-hour days. It's never your movie."

The director has resisted letting his post-production experiences on *DRIVE* crush his directorial ambitions. "I never set out to make art. It's entertainment, and from what everyone has told me, the shortened version of *DRIVE* still entertains. It does make you wonder how long you can keep this up, though—how long you can take it. Either you get successful enough that they can't get to you, or you stop caring. I don't want to do that. Because what's the point of making movies if you don't care?" □



MIGHTY JOE YOUNG

continued from page 31

cutouts of the man's crucial frames be made and animated along with Joe's hand over the painting. Everyone agreed. The images were isolated with a blade, retouched with paint for definition, and Harryhausen quietly resumed the shot.

Three days later, on the same setup, he animated Joe dropping O'Hara to the ground. Unhappily, the contraption suspending the stuntman was visible below the painting, dangling like a vine. "We never attempted to correct that," Harryhausen recalled. "It seemed like a minor thing at the time. Audiences were less critical in those days; we didn't think they'd notice. And we had to move on."

The giant Golden Safari set built on Pathe 11 was made even more colossal in long shot by rear-projecting it in miniature, extending its parameters with glass art, and inserting musicians in tree huts with separate process projectors. In this setup, Joe makes a Herculean debut by rising from the orchestra pit, balancing Jill on a piano platform as she plays "Beautiful Dreamer." Roy Webb's lush orchestration of the song ends the scene on a crashing chord.

Pete Peterson did most of the delicate animation. Harryhausen worked on a few piano shots, shuttling back to the *bravura* scene of Joe knocking over the lion cage, and O'Brien lent his hand, including a version of Joe's garish closeup where he rolls his eyes and cranes his neck, annoyed by the nightclub clamor. At a cost of \$2,000, Cooper ordered construction of an elliptical platform that rocked and rotated on support cables for Terry Moore. In animation, a matching miniature pedestal was fastened to Joe's hands, and Moore was projected in from behind. Joe's head bobs up and down in befuddlement, always concerned with his lady's safety while the tune keeps him in check. Peterson was proud of the scene, which required precise coordination of the stop-motion to the circular movement of the process image. In long shot, Joe and Jill were miniatures.

Background plates for Joe's tug-of-war with a string of



One of Joe's many expressive takes in the film, showcasing the improved fur on the model that, unlike King Kong, revealed none of the animators' fingerprints.

wrestlers, anchored by the wonderfully ugly Swedish Angel (Phil Olafson) and heavyweight champ Primo Carnera, were shot on January 27, 1948 and rear-projected for animation in April. The projected rope's take-up section was split-screened out and replaced with vacant set, allowing the four-inch Joe puppet to reel in the rope at the split line. The illusion is flawless, as is Ray Harryhausen's virtuoso handling of the mano-a-monstro boxing scene between Joe and Carnera—the payoff to the nights O'Brien brought "young Harry" to the ringside bouts in downtown Los Angeles.

The organ-grinder gag, where Joe is trussed-up like a chimpanzee, became a set piece for Ray Harryhausen's trademark gestures of insecurity and rage. The glib tone of the film is punctured violently when a drunk (Nestor Paiva) hurls a whiskey bottle at Joe, hitting him squarely in the neck. There is nothing funny about this; no viewer can claim indifference to his horrified squeal. Circus, at last, takes a back seat to grim drama as Joe is pitted against a sea of reckless inhuman faces, in a setting that equates animal cruelty with entertainment.

The sequence called for Joe to be bombarded by frisbee-sized coins flung by lit-up patrons. Stop-framing balsa wood coins on wires was considered impractical, so Disney animator Scott Whitaker was brought in to cartoon the coin action and match it to Ray's footage. On the printer, Lin Dunn combined the shots using the backlit trav-

eling matte Whitaker had generated on the animation stand.

Significantly, with the exception of this and the Ben Johnson doll sliding down the rope on the orphanage wall, no traveling mattes were used—a technical feat in itself. This in contrast to KONG, which relied heavily on Dunning and Williams shots for grand-scope vistas, often with spotty results. Willis O'Brien keyed Joe's composites exclusively to miniature and full scale projection—it avoided costly traveling matte runs on the printer and catered to his penchant for doing everything in the camera. The image of Terry Moore tossing a banana to Joe at the plantation gate, for example, could easily have been t-matted; instead, she performed in front of an 18-foot rear projection of the animation setup. Scenes like this were simply shunted into the process agenda at the tail-end of live-action photography. And with the budget ballooning, Cooper was adamant on having ARKO maintain self-sufficiency, which meant steering clear of RKO's optical department wherever possible.

The most complicated scene had Joe break into O'Hara's campsite and tip over a lion cage—a tour de force of model animation and in-camera processes working simultaneously. Furiously miffed, Joe beats his fists on the cage roof. When the lion bites his finger (words cannot do justice to the facial expression and body lurch), he knocks the wagon over, pounds it to bits, trips over the rubble, and throws a

rock at the escaping cat before giving chase on all fours.

Harryhausen tackled this scene alone in July 1948, taking the full month to complete it. The master shot, a breathtaking composition, used a real river bi-packed with the camera negative, multiplane glass art, a front-projected lion put in on a second pass, an animated lion, and a rear-projected section for the cat's escape route. Harryhausen painstakingly calculated the tip-over action—there could be no retake. When Cooper screened the dailies, he saw the most life-like and energetic singular stop-motion moment in the annals of trick photography. Even John Ford was bowled over by it. "He and I met briefly before the picture started," Ray recalled. "I was quite pleased when Ford sent word through the camera department to me that he loved that scene."

By mid-August, MR. JOSEPH YOUNG OF AFRICA was nine months in production, and Cooper was \$650,000 over budget. The original \$1,550,000 figure had escalated to \$2 million in May, and the final tab with overhead was skirting the \$2,200,000 mark, something that RKO vice president Ned Depinet could not understand. In a cordial but strained letter to Cooper, he wrote: "I want you to watch *every dime* between now and the completion of the picture, Merian, and hold down the cost as low as possible... Your reputation is at stake here, my friend, and I hope you'll come through as you always do." Adding to Depinet's woes was the takeover of RKO by Howard Hughes. Despite his millions, even Hughes was bitching over the spiraling cost.

Unlike KING KONG, where a handful of men did the work, O'Brien was obliged by unions to maintain large crews on JOE YOUNG. Featherbedding by gaffers was no rarity, and a limb on one of the critical models would sometimes be conveniently broken if someone felt like quitting early, adding more days to the pressed animation schedule. Admittedly, OBie was no angel. He functioned well on the set, but when Schoedsack riled him or the atmosphere became oppressive, the Coral Island tavern across the street was

his oasis. It reached the point where Cooper assigned production manager Lloyd Richards to watchdog Stage One, ordering more animation in one day than was humanly possible. Harryhausen had his own frustrations: he couldn't move a light stand or redress a model without some union man clogging up the payroll. The experience led him to seek more modest producers with studio ties, a route that he would ply as his own career blossomed.

The rest of JOE YOUNG's animation embraced the destruction of the nightclub, the getaway, and the orphanage conflagration. On December 8, a typical day, Ray Harryhausen started the remarkable scene of Joe rescuing the baby from the ledge; Pete Peterson animated the Ben Johnson maquette descending the rope; and Willis O'Brien did a closeup of Joe's hand teasing the lions at the bar.

The Golden Safari miniature, which stretched 30 feet across, housed five process setups for projected footage of lions scrambling about in African dioramas, and a cluster of breakaway tree huts, jungle facades and canopies which were laid out on tabletops and sawhorses for Joe's rampage. OBie and Peterson animated several cuts of Joe wrecking the musician's tree house while Harryhausen handled more violent scenes. The shot of the cats vaulting onto Joe's back and the one of him swinging onto a canopy and tumbling down, along with most of the scenery, were horrors to film. "Suspending Joe on wires was never easy," Harryhausen winced, "especially when he had to be airborne. Everything had to be rigged ahead of time. If you leave a clamp loose, you're at the mercy of gravity. Generally, we used very thin piano wire, but I sometimes used support rods as OBie had done on KING KONG. On the orphanage tree, we used everything from metal bands to monofilament to scotch tape, just to keep him in place."

O'Brien gave Peterson the truck chase to animate in September 1948 while Ray had Joe slugging it out with the lions. The live-action comedy here was brilliantly conceived—



These stop-motion puppets were used for the roping sequence of MIGHTY JOE YOUNG, to show horses and riders moving in front of the animated ape.

O'Hara feigns a heart attack, mascots the chase, and his vaudevillian interplay with James Flavin is priceless (what's a hardboiled New York cop doing in Hollywood, anyway?) O'Brien instructed Peterson to extend the comedy into the animation.

The resulting schtick had Joe ride the tall gate legs out, spit at the pursuing squad car, wipe his lip with a brusque, John Wayne flourish, and twiddle his thumbs in boredom. One cut of Joe rhythmically thrusting his body forward in defiance was deftly animated. But the burlesque throws Joe's tenor out of whack and momentarily veers everything to the point of sendup—precisely what had made SON OF KONG a flop. Mercifully, Cooper excised a shot of Joe picking his nose and flinging the snotball gracefully into the distance.

The jarring cut to the orphanage fire shocked audiences of the day—to maximize the thrills, Cooper had the entire sequence toned and tinted in blazing reds and oranges. The orphanage itself stood seven feet high. Mechanical effects man Jack Lannon rigged it with gas jets and solenoids, which knocked out plaster sections on cue. A vibrating mechanism coaxed the disintegration along while Harold Stine's camera rolled at 96 frames per second.

Every trick in the book was used to create and sustain ten minutes of visual bombardment. Roy Webb's searing violins rip through the holocaust as Joe scrambles up a tree to help

Jill and Gregg rescue the orphans. His climb in long shot was neatly animated by Marcel Delgado using the four-inch Joe he loved best. The sequence, directed by O'Brien, is saturated with split screens, miniature process shots, optically-printed licks of flame, and in-camera sectional matte work, which put Joe on the roof as the walls came tumbling down. One colossal shot had Terry Moore and Ben Johnson race up a staircase in front of a giant fire projection, with the crumbling edifice split-screened in on the side. Ray Harryhausen's heroic scene of Joe grabbing the baby teetering on the ledge is well-animated and dramatically inspired: with a gooseflesh crash of cymbals, the star plucks the child in one grand sweep and holds her to his chest, redeeming himself forever.

Animation wrapped around Christmas 1948—a total of 14 month's work under one roof. There was no mass reverie—the shots petered out gradually, and no one had been marking calendars. Roy Webb's score was recorded on December 15 under the baton of house conductor Constantin Bakaleinikoff, and sound effects were tracked in by dubbing mixers Clem Portman and Earl Mounce.

Cooper screened the first complete print of MR. JOSEPH YOUNG OF AFRICA for RKO executives on January 24, 1949. The print was 10,108 feet. Reaction was mixed. Objections centered on the forced comedy, Armstrong's hamminess, a sequence in the club in which an

obese playboy ridicules Jill, and "the tendency to milk every situation to the point of exasperation." Above all, the length and loudness of the nightclub destruction and the orphanage fire alarmed them. Bigger wasn't necessarily better, he was told, so he pruned some superfluous footage in O'Hara's New York office, deleted the playboy bit, cut out Terry Moore's courtroom monologue, and pared down Armstrong as much as his ego would allow—ten minutes of screen time in all.

Of paramount concern was the abrupt change to color. "The Technicolor fire sequence hit me right on the nose," barked RKO producer Jack Gross. "For a second I thought the projectionist had on the wrong reel! Frankly, I thought the fire sequence would never end. I'm afraid if we had a typical Hollywood preview audience we would have been in trouble." (According to RKO files, a preliminary batch of prints used actual Technicolor for the orphanage. When the cost became prohibitive, the "tone-and-tint" process was used on black & white film. Those who saw the color remember it as being truly spectacular—a far cry from the crimson simulation on the "archival" version on home video. Prints released after the initial playdates were struck completely in black & white. The negative was reportedly destroyed, and all color-sequence prints seem to have vanished.)

Merian Cooper sneaked JOE YOUNG in Santa Monica on February 6, 1949 on an unsuspecting audience who had paid to see COMMANDO SQUADRON. To set them up, he walked on stage with a word of warning, that the finale's excitement might prove too harrowing for children under six. Unwisely, he cranked up the sound during the holocaust, causing patrons to bolt for the exits. The error would not be repeated, and the film was cut by another 1600 feet. Sneak previews in Oakland and San Carlos were "good to terrific."

In March, the title was changed to THE GREAT JOE YOUNG and in May to MIGHTY JOE YOUNG. It pre-viewed at the Criterion in New

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York on July 13, 1949, a date dreaded by Cooper, who was hopelessly superstitious. The inevitable ballyhoo trumpeted 'Merian Cooper's Amazing Adventure in the Unusual' as having "ten of the greatest thrills ever pictured," and it opened to mixed reviews on July 30. Only *Newsweek* seemed to capture its essence, describing it as "a swift succession of serio-comic improbabilia geared to sure-fire elementary entertainment."

Chicago critics were brutal, condemning it as "the most atrocious film in a decade" and "technically shoddy." The owner of the RKO Grand lashed back with a three-column "open letter" ad: "If you're so right, how do you account for the crowds that have visited this theater in the last week? They have bought only one thing—entertainment. MIGHTY JOE YOUNG has it. It delivers no message. It's not an artistic triumph. But it takes you out of the mundane, work-a-day world and entertains you as no other picture has done before."

The words were right on the

money; picture returns were another story. The actual direct cost of MIGHTY JOE YOUNG was \$1,880,245, but with 25% overhead accrued during its two-year residency on the lot, the final tab came to \$2,345,456, overshooting the budget by \$800,000—enough left over for an "A" picture at RKO. Despite the P.T. Barnum-style publicity campaign, the film failed to generate the dollars that Cooper anticipated and in no way approached his early conviction that "it would out-gross KING KONG." Unlike the milieu stomped on by Joe's 50-foot ancestor, there were no Depression-weary urbanites flocking in droves to see such an anomaly. Moreover, distribution was spotty. RKO had been flush during the mid-'40s, but under Howard Hughes' reckless management, the company lost nearly \$5 million each year from 1948 to 1950. When the Supreme Court divestment order hit in 1948, RKO was forced to abandon its theater chain, driving the film further into oblivion.

MIGHTY JOE YOUNG won the Academy Award for Special Visual Effects on March 24, 1950—a trophy Willis O'Brien should have received for his groundbreaking work on KING KONG. Also named at the ceremony were Bert Willis and Harold Stine in deference to the camera department. O'Brien, his humor unabated, dressed the statuette as a Toreador. It sat regally on his nightstand brandishing its little red cape until his death in 1962.

Merian Caldwell Cooper, in his zest for putting the extraordinary on the screen, produced in 1949 a heartwarming, power-charged animal picture. If he harbored pangs of envy over his brief tenancy at MGM when WAR EAGLES was faltering while THE WIZARD OF OZ was blooming, he shouldn't have. A decade later, in a way, he created his own WIZARD OF OZ.

On the surface, there is no way to compare the two pictures, artistically or thematically. But consider the similarities

in the story of a young girl living a sheltered life on a farm and dreaming of a land far removed from her routine world. One day, she and her pet are whisked off to this distant land, but they are painfully out of place, and their plight to return home is fraught with obstacles.

By the end, Dorothy and Toto are back where they belong, and so are Jill and Joe. "Beautiful Dreamer" climbs to a swell, and we are told that they lived happily ever after—reminding us, in case we've forgotten, that this has all been one giant fairy tale in the Cooper-Schoedsack-O'Brien tradition, the likes of which Hollywood would never see again.

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JAMES WHALE

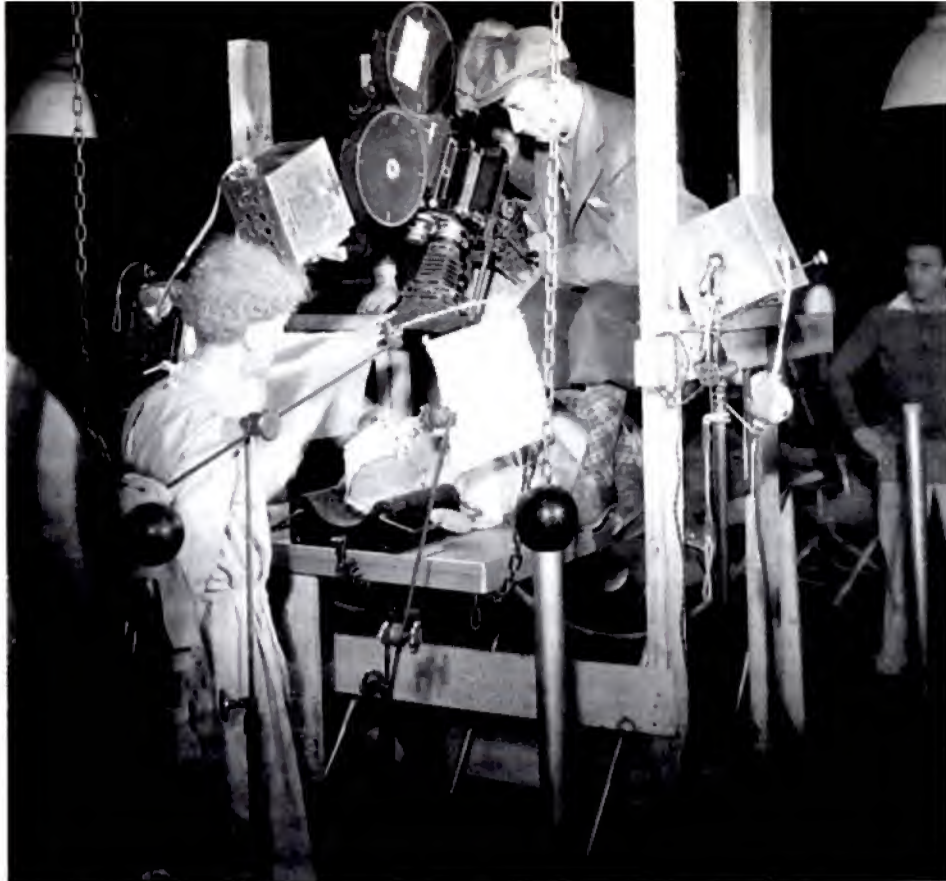
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W hale continued to concentrate on new projects, even traveling to England to consult with Sheriff on the screenplay for a film to be called *A TRIP TO MARS*, but Universal cancelled the picture at the last moment, and Whale was finally forced to give in to Laemmle's demands for the *FRANKENSTEIN* sequel. He decided to take up the narrative where the previous film left off, setting it within a framing device in which Mary Shelley, continuing her tale in the company of Lord Byron and her lover Percy, introduces the unpublished ending to her famous novel.

According to Elsa Lanchester, Whale wanted to avoid doing a mere remake, and insisted that the new film approach the subject from a different perspective. He felt that *THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* should be about the fact "that very sweet, very pretty people, both men and women, had very wicked thoughts inside, evil thoughts. These thoughts could be dragons; they could be monsters; they could be of Frankenstein's laboratory. So James wanted the same actress for both parts [of Mary Shelley and the Bride] to show that the Bride of Frankenstein did, after all, come out of sweet Mary Shelley's soul."

W hale also insisted that the creature speak in the sequel, a decision that Karloff resisted, in a continuance of the disagreements over character which had begun on the set of *FRANKENSTEIN*. Whale's exaggerated class-consciousness and sense of social rivalry may have fueled the arguments; he referred to Karloff as a "former truck driver," though he was well aware of the actor's background. This same social jealousy may, as in *FRANKENSTEIN*, have contributed to the plot and characterizations in *THE BRIDE*. The Mary Shelley introduction establishes the narrator and her listeners as a group of artists living beyond the social norms of their day, "outsiders" rejected by polite members of their own class. They are also, as a result of their scandalous behavior, regarded by the mainstream as moral monsters, a fact which must have suggested to Whale a parallel to his own situation as a gay artist in '30s Hollywood.

There has been considerable critical speculation regarding the sexual implications of the themes in both of Whale's *FRANKENSTEIN* films. Certainly the sympathetic treatment of the creature, his persecution by a morally outraged



Ernest Thesiger (left) watches as James Whale (obscured by the cameraman) peers through the camera to get a closeup of the *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*.

society, and his need for a type of companionship regarded as monstrously evil (even by his creator) all suggest a metaphorical description of the loneliness and alienation experienced by the majority of gay men in Whale's time. The appearance of Thesiger in the role of the mad Dr. Praetorius in *THE BRIDE* is a further reminder of Whale's gay sensibility. Some analysts have further pointed out the curious asexuality of the character of Henry Frankenstein, and the creative nature of his relationship with Dr. Praetorius (himself a gay stereotype), which leads to the "birth" of their monstrous creature "child." While both suggestions are compelling, there is greater evidence in support of the former theory, since we have Whale's own words indicating his identification with the character of the creature. The latter notion, which proposes a gay identification with the mad doctors, seems much less likely—Frankenstein is portrayed in an unambiguous (albeit unlucky) heterosexual relationship with Elizabeth, a relationship which is repeatedly threatened by the figure of the outsider. Furthermore, he is horrified at the unnatural consequences of his experiments in both films; if this is a metaphor for the shame and self-loathing of a closet homosexual, it bears little resemblance to Whale's own apparently well-adjusted acceptance of his own sexuality. In any case, some critical restraint is called for. It is all too easy to impose the values of a later time on an older work, and while Whale demonstrated what may be identified as a "gay style" in both design and characterizations, it is important to remember that he had little

influence over the actual plots of his films, and that elaborate structural theorizing is therefore inappropriate. □

BARKER

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cause we shouldn't forget Lynn [Redgrave] in all of this, is dynamic, in the way that all of this plays out."

Barker was enthusiastic about the essential element that Redgrave brought to the film. "Absolutely, Lynn's character brings a quirky humor to the thing, which gives a certain balance to the picture," said Barker. "The picture plays very well to just regular audiences, who just want a story and perhaps don't feel a heck of a lot about James Whale. One of the reasons it plays so well is because you have these dark tragic passages which are relieved every now and then by a break of humor provided by Lynn."

It's interesting that Whale is not a young idealistic movie maker in *GODS AND MONSTERS*. Instead he is seen, at least from the audiences view point in the beginning of the movie, as a lecherous old man. "Ian, Bill and I talked about that," admitted Barker. "There is an argument that you should really only tell incredibly popular stories. The way that I end up on that is: a story is a story is a story. If it's worth telling, you tell the story without regard to its political implications. Because if you start to put your politics before instincts as a storyteller I think you end up being a very dull storyteller. The tale of James Whale is like any human story—a very complicated story. It has moments

of great joy in it, moments when Whale is seen in the height of his powers."

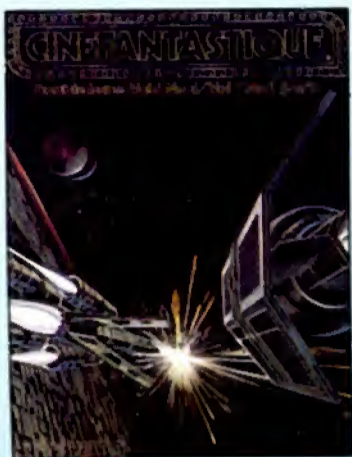
Still one wonders if Barker's fans will follow him into a gay, non-effects drama. Barker was quick to address this subject head on, stating, "I realize that there's a difference between the literary and cinematic worlds. But my experience has been that my readers are open to all sorts of ideas. When I published *Sacrament* a few years ago, a novel with a gay hero, sales were as strong as they had been on previous books. So, my sense is that, at least where readers are concerned, there's no anxiety where the sexual identity of a character is concerned. Where movies are concerned—well, I guess we're going to see, right? A number of recent movies, that contained gay themes, have been walking away with good reviews and the support of audiences. So I think we've come to the point where people are perfectly comfortable with this."

One by-product of this film is that it offers audiences a small slice of horror film history. "James Whale is one of my heroes," said Barker. "I've long counted *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* as the great American horror movie. I pretty much hope to expect *CFQ* readers for this, but I think a lot of the fans of the genre are remarkably ignorant about its history. I do think that respect for the artists who built the whole genre is important, and Whale is certainly one of those men. We should honor these people."

Ultimately, *GODS AND MONSTERS* is a stunning tribute to Whale and his movies—and a bold change-of-pace for Barker. "You can absolutely say that I'm headed in a new direction," he concluded, but cautioned, "it took a long time to get this movie made. It took a long time to get a very, very small amount of money together. And that was, for both Bill and me, disheartening. We're talking about a period of years, from that first conversation, to the cameras rolling."

"There's no question that the way that movies are made today makes it harder and harder to make movies like *GODS AND MONSTERS*. Therefore, for me, it's so very important, when a picture like this is made and made as well as Bill made the picture, to celebrate it. It is important to get it out there so that next time, Bill and I, or whoever else it is, are out there looking for somebody to give them the money for a similar project, there will be support for it." □

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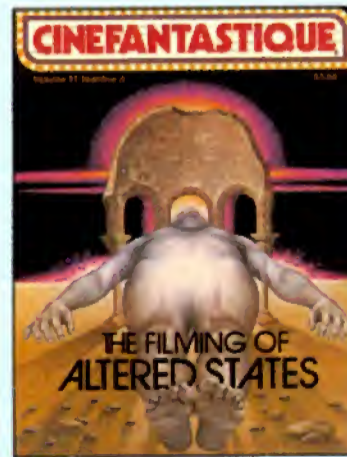
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